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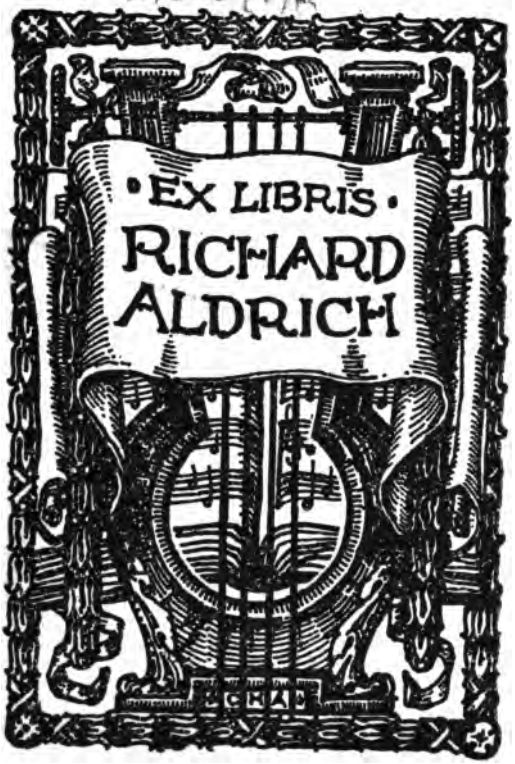

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THIRTY YEARS'

MUSICAL RECOLLECTIONS.

BY

HENRY F. CHORLEY,

AUTHOR OF

"MODERN GERMAN MUSIC," "HANDEL STUDIES."

ETC., ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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LONDON:
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TO MRS. FREDERICK LEHMANN.

You belong by birth to Literature—by marriage to Art.—You possess those powers of appreciating both, which indicate the existence of creative talent, did you care to exercise it.—But beyond this, you have the constancy and kindliness, by which that rare thing—a true friend—is to be known.—And for these last, the following Recollections are inscribed to you—by

Yours faithfully and gratefully,

HENRY F. CHORLEY.

LONDON, May, 1862.

INTRODUCTION.

THERE is one only way in which a book like the following can be written, with any chance of its possessing some value.—This is by aid of faithfulness to recollection, and sincerity in offering opinion. In so much as either romance or suppression enter into the record, its worth is impaired.

Personality there must be—and such bias as is decided by individuality. If a judgment beyond appeal can be formed by human creature on any question—it is, surely, not on a question of Art.—In that imaginative world and its enjoyments, human sympathies will have their share, let Reason be

ever so conscientious.—Then there is association; That which we have heard during those good moments (of which Life contains many for all who will have them)—That which we have been obliged to hear, when the heart has been sad and the attention unwilling,—can, in neither case, be altogether truthfully presented.—I have tried my utmost to be a fair witness.—If there be more of myself in these pages than under other circumstances would be graceful or self-respecting, such egotism has been allowed, for the express purpose of enabling those who may read,—to agree or to differ with me in proportion as they approve my predilections, or dissent from my prejudices.

It is impossible to execute a task like mine without speaking of artists still living, as well as of those who have vanished from every scene. With regard to the former, this can only be done by considering them as they have presented themselves or been presented in public—setting on one

side such allusion, or anecdote, or experience belonging to rumour or intercourse, as are derived from private knowledge. There can be no offence, however, in writing of actors and actresses that which is to be seen, and may be remembered by every eye-witness, or reader of the news of the hour.

Thus, too, it has seemed best to be silent on all such tales of the green-room, as relate to the dealings of manager with artist—to the character of the one, or the grievances of the other.—My chronicle is written from *before the curtain*, and with no wish to rake up old quarrels, or to pronounce on vexed questions.—The result is the thing to be dealt with. The wisdom or the folly of this or the other line of policy,—may be judged by the evidence offered as to results—and such opinion of the trustworthiness of the witness as he may be able to inspire.

The reader who takes these recollections in hand will hardly do so without already possessing some in-

terest in, and knowledge of, their subject. Therefore I have refrained from encumbering my pages with too many minute references, and too many foreign words. The titles of the separate musical pieces in the Operas referred to, would be of small value or importance,—whereas their perpetual insertion would have made the text unreadable.

It has been difficult to arrange the matter of this book, without going over the same ground, more than once, or else making the whole collection tiresome, because of its fragmentary nature.—Thus it will be seen, that in attempting some characteristics of the composers and singers who have ruled the stage—a certain liberty of grouping has been taken: while the leading features of every year as it passed have been dwelt upon. I have endeavoured to distribute the portraits and speculations which form substantial essays, so as to vary a story at best liable to the charge of frivolity and monotony.

The lists here offered of the principal features which have marked the opera-campaigns of the past thirty years, may be found useful for purposes of reference.

Lastly, this book of mine is strictly what it professes to be—a book of Recollections.—I have merely resorted to former memoranda for the yearly lists of operas and singers,* and in *no one case* have consulted them with a view of refreshing my memory, or of fabricating an opinion of that which had passed from my mind. It has been gratifying to me, on comparing these pages, after they were written, with the notes thrown off at the time,—to have found no discrepancy betwixt past and present judgments worth adverting to.—Had I done so, I should have conceived it a duty to have pointed it out.

H. F. C.

* In the case of only two of the principal singers named —Madame Meric-Lalande;—and Signor David—have I spoken from hearsay.

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THE YEAR 1830.

OPERAS.

"Il Pirata."*—*Bellini.*—"Il Matrimonio," "Gli Orazi."—*Cimarosa.*—"Elisa e Claudio," "La Donna Caritea."*—*Mercadante.*—"Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.*—Semiramide," "Otello," "La Cenerentola," "Il Barbiére," "La Gazza Ladra," "Matilda di Shabran," "Il Turco," "l'Inganno Felice."—*Rossini.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Méric Lalande.* Blasis. Malibran—MM. Ambrogi. Curioni. Donzelli. Santini. Lablache.*

BALLETS.

"Flore et Zephyre."—"Guillaume Tell."*—"Massaniello." "La Somnambule."

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Brocard. Taglioni.*—M. Perrot.

* The asterisk indicates first performance or first appearance.

THE YEAR 1830.

WHAT a change has passed over the foreign musical drama in England since the foregoing was the programme of London's Italian Opera season!—The orchestra in 1830 was, compared with what it is now, meagre and ill-disciplined;—the chorus was an ear-torment rather than an ear-pleasure;—the scenery and appointments were shabby to penury;—but "Guillaume Tell," (desecrated as "Massaniello" had been, into *ballet* form), was new.—It was the year when Signor Rossini's formidable Italian rival (as the public has since learned to think) first was heard in England. It was the year of the first appearances here of Lablache, and of Mademoiselle Taglioni.—Each of the three events noted marks an epoch.

Though the predominance of the composer of "Il Barbiére" had as yet given way in no respect, there were other modern Italian composers whose works were worth trying. Signor Mercadante was

little known ; but the clever and level music of his early operas, in spite of their containing effective airs and concerted pieces, is too utterly devoid of freshness or individuality for them to have stood a chance of taking a permanent root here, so long as Signor Rossini was in the ascendancy.—With the temporary mitigation of that master's popularity they were sure to perish for ever, since their life amounted to his forms, reproduced second-hand.—It is not so with "Il Pirata." Weak as that opera is (only containing a couple of tenor airs which are sung now), an individuality exists in Bellini's music. Whenever individuality is not mere eccentricity there is always interest in it—there is always a chance of that interest becoming a charm. But till Rubini adopted "Tu vedrai," the charm was not recognized in this country, and the young Sicilian composer was treated with unanimous contempt.

From Madame Meric Lalande, a French lady* by birth, and a pupil of Garcia—who had for six years been reported to be one of the best singers in Italy —much had been expected. Our opera-goers had heard of serenades beneath her windows—of medals struck in her honour. She had been compared with the best of the best. But she arrived in England too late: and her place, moreover, had been filled by women of greater genius. She was a good

* Born at Dunkirk, 1798.

musician, and sung with taste; but her voice—a *soprano*—ere she came, had contracted a habit of trembling, in those days a novelty (would it had always remained so!) to which English ears were then averse. She gave little satisfaction.

The season could hardly have been carried through without the presence of Mdlle. Blasis—one of those invaluable artists of the second class, who are always prepared, always acceptable—complete in what they do, if never exciting their audiences to high pleasure. Her voice was good, and her manner intelligent—her appearance, however, was not prepossessing. She had seen much, and had studied well; and the main weight of the *soprano* singing of the season 1830 may be said to have rested on her shoulders. It seems hard that the popularity of artists so modest, so sedulous, so useful as she was, should bear such small proportion to their real value. The subordinate ladies who filled up the company were very poor—the absence of an efficient *contralto* being less felt than might otherwise have been the case, owing to the versatility of Malibran, who was able to sing either "Semiramide" or "Arsace," as the case required, or as the humour took her.

Ere I attempt some character of her, and of the great artist who made his first appearance in England that season, in detail, a word of recollection is

due to Donzelli,* who had for some years been singing in England. He had one of the most melliflu-ous robust low tenor voices ever heard—a voice which had never by practice been made sufficiently flexible to execute Signor Rossini's operas as they are written—but who even in this respect was accomplished and finished, if compared with the violent persons who have succeeded him in Italy—each one louder and less available than his predecessor. The volume of Donzelli's rich and sonorous voice was real, not forced.—When he gave out its high notes there was no misgiving as to the peril of his blood-vessels; and hence, his reign on the Italian stage was thrice as long as that of any of the worse-endowed, worse-trained folk, who have since adopted the career of forcible tenors, partly from a wish to split the ears of the groundlings, partly from that innate laziness which, together with the increased facilities in gathering gains during modern time, has so largely corrupted art.

Donzelli had an open countenance and a manly bearing on the stage; but no great dramatic power. In emulation of Garcia—whose fiery southern genius justified him in any usurpation that he chose to make—the less able tenor laid hands on "Don Juan;" unable, however, to vindicate himself as the Spaniard had done. To the hazardous

* Born at Bologna about 1790.

nature of such experiments, and the mischief they produce, I shall have too many opportunities of returning as the Opera years go on.

Times are, happily, changed since such a masterpiece among operas as "Guillaume Tell" could only be smuggled into England stripped of nearly all save its overture and dance-music, in the form of a *ballet*, as "Massaniello" had been before it. Yet even as thus presented, and with Mademoiselle Taglioni, in the prime of her grace, to dance the *Tyrolienne*, our connoisseurs were deaf to its beauty. In the year 1830 a work written with French text, for the Opera at Paris, was, by that very circumstance, condemned in this country. Nor was Taglioni—in spite of that exquisite and airy grace which created an entirely new style of dancing—in her first season, appreciated as she deserved to be.

MARIA MALIBRAN.

THIS year 1830 may be recorded as Malibran's second regular season at our Italian Opera, after her return from America. It was also her last one:—since the few appearances which she made there in 1833 were merely what may be called extra performances, in which she repeated a few favourite parts. Here, then, some recollections and characteristics of one who set the world on fire may be fitly offered.

The task is not an easy one. While I remember Malibran, her appearance, her voice, and certain of her performances, more vividly than I can now recall many good things of yesterday, I feel that there was something feverish, meteoric, ever changing into a new surprise, both in her nature and her art, which dazzled while it delighted,—leaving the witness with small readiness available for balance and comparison of impressions. Appreciation and

memory do not imply the power of presenting and representing. We know past ecstacies, dreams, terrors, by heart: yet may fail, by any exercise of ingenuity, to convey an idea of them to others.

From the first hour when Maria Garcia* appeared on the stage—first in "Il Barbiére," and subsequently in "Il Crociato"—it was evident that a new artist, as original as extraordinary, was come—one by Nature fairly endowed, not merely with physical powers, but also with that inventive, energetic, rapid genius before which obstacles become as nothing, and by aid of which the sharpest contradictions can be reconciled.

She may not have been beautiful; but she was better than beautiful—in so much as a speaking Spanish human countenance by Murillo is ten times more fascinating than many a faultless angel-face such as Guido could paint.—There was health of tint, with but a slight touch of the yellow rose, in her complexion; great mobility of expression in her features; an honest, direct, brightness of eye; a refinement in the form of her head, and in the set of it on her shoulders, more obvious in 1830 than it could be in 1860, when the desire of female Beauty seems to be to obliterate that which so thoroughly ex-

* Born in Paris, 1808; made her first appearance in London, 1825; married in America, 1826; re-appeared in London, 1829; died, 1836.

presses grace, high-breeding, and character—the turn of the head. But Malibran had her own tastes and fashions in dress. She knew what suited her features. At a time when public singers indulged in crowning themselves with hearses of feathers and gigantic hats (the size of which to-day seems so absurd in some caricature by Chalon) I remember to have seen her braided hair circled by a fine Venetian chain;—with one small gold coin, serving for clasp, above her forehead, and attracting every eye by the thorough fitness of the ornament to its wearer. Perhaps the chain and the coin indicated the character of a woman—if not in her life, in her art at least—thoroughly, fearlessly, original.

Her voice was not naturally a voice of first-rate quality. It was a *mezzo-soprano*, extended upwards and downwards by that hardy and tremendous exercise, the introduction of which has been ascribed to the appearance of her father, in singing and tuition. To support this no common strength and tenacity of frame are necessary; and perhaps the discipline can never be fully wrought out without some sacrifice of power and certainty. As it was, the girl was early put into possession of an instrument two octaves and a half, if not more, in compass, weakest in the tones betwixt F and F—a weakness audaciously and incomparably disguised by the forms of execution, modification, and

ornament which she selected. Her topmost and deepest notes were perpetually used in connected contrast, whatever the song might be—whether it was the *bravura* from "Inez di Castro," or Haydn's "With verdure clad." On the stage her flights and sallies told with electric effect. There was much of her restless and impassioned southern nature in them—as much of a musical invention and skill, which required no master to prompt or to regulate her cadences; but there was something, too, of an instinctive eagerness on her part to evade display in the portion of her voice to which display would have been the least becoming. In some degree, that which began by being an individuality with her, has become a sort of necessity to all who have been subjected to a similar training.

If this be so—a question is inevitably suggested—whether in Art it is better to force or to cultivate Nature—to ignore defects, or to admit them, and turn them to account. No founders of a school of singers can expect that two people, during a century, shall enter it, so indomitable, so fervid, so full of resource, as the Garcia sisters; but for its scholars to emulate them, might prove a fatal ambition—and it has done so.

Though creative as an executant, Malibran was not a creative dramatic artist.—Though the fertility

and audacity of her musical invention had no limits—though she had the power and the science of a composer—she did not establish one new opera or character on the stage—hardly, even, one first-class song in a concert-room.—Though she was received with royal honours in Milan, Naples,* Venice, where she excited her audiences to frenzies of enthusiasm, and where the soldiers presented arms as she passed—on the Italian stage in London she was unable to possess herself of the succession to Madame Pasta—or to satisfy our public as thoroughly as a far younger and less accomplished artist—Madame Grisi, did shortly after her disappearance. She is best remembered, perhaps, in Italian opera, as *Desdemona*—especially in the incomparable third act of "Otello"; and no theatrical portrait of modern time could be named

* It was at Naples that she gave way to one of her oddest caprices. "She played," says Madame Merlin, in her Memoirs, "in a new opera, 'Amelia,' composed by Rossi. In this opera Malibran undertook to dance the Mazurka. She never excelled in dancing, though she was excessively fond of it. Her native grace seemed to forsake her whenever she attempted to dance; still she seized every possible opportunity of dancing on the stage. In this instance, Madame Malibran's Mazurka certainly contributed to the failure of 'Amelia'."—I have elsewhere been assured that she could never dance in time—a peculiarity which, however singular it seems, has distinguished more than one perfectly-organized musician.

surpassing that by M. Dubufe, of herself in the chamber scene.—On the whole, she was found unequal, bizarre, and fatiguing, by many of our opera-loungers (a public as apt to be scared as allured, by original genius). Her real stage triumphs in this country were, when she sang in English as *Amina*, as *Leonora* in "Fidelio;"—*Isolina* in Mr. Balfe's "Maid of Artois," being her third character.—In her English performances her exuberance, not to say, extravagance of style, served the purpose of concealing the mediocrity, and worse, of her playfellows. To myself it always brought as much of wonder as of delight. Her vehemence in "La Sonnambula," too nearly trenched on frenzy to be true; in "Fidelio," it destroyed that idea of faltering and fear which gives so much tenderness to the earlier scenes of the tale of Woman's devotion. She delivered Beethoven's music wondrously, considering its unsuitability for her voice—making changes and adaptations where they were inevitable with such musician-like science, that not the protest of a solitary purist could be raised against them;—but the effect produced in the opera by a singer incomparably inferior to her, Madame Schroëder Devrient, was far deeper, and more moving. The Spaniard threw more horror into the scene in the vault than her predecessor; but the German is

before me, when, in the introduction to the Chorus of Prisoners, as they creep out of their cells, she questioned one ghastly face after another, with the heart-piercing wistfulness of hope long deferred. Nothing comparable has since been seen on the musical stage, till the other day, when the younger sister of Malibran struck the same chords, by her admirable pantomime, as *Orpheus*, in Gluck's Opera, when he is shown as searching for his *Eurydice* in the "yellow meads of asphodel."

As a woman, Malibran was ambitious, fond of gain, munificent in giving (and this when no chorus was at hand to applaud the gift)—noble, careless—insatiable in her search for excitement and effect. These facts have been so often told by her personal friends and her old comrades, that their story need not be returned on.

There is no need to relate minutely the tale of her wretched American first marriage; neither how, by breaking away from it, she flung herself into suspense and perplexity, from which one like herself could only find refuge in excitement, and to which may be ascribed many of the caprices and inequalities which, for some years of her life, were supposed by her audiences to be only so many whimsies of a violent and reckless woman. Calmer days might have been in store for her after her second marriage with M. De Beriot—but for her prema-

ture decease, hurried on by her wilfulness in concealing the consequences of an accident while she was riding (a favourite pastime of hers).—Nothing could possibly be more painful than her agonizing death, in the midst of the Manchester Festival of 1836, only a few hours after one of those unexpected outbursts of inspiration, in which she was unparalleled. Nothing could be more sad to English eyes than its sequel.—Of a woman so bright, so kindly, so ill-starred, and thence (it may be), so unequal, as she, it is impossible to think, without a strange and affectionate regret. Of the artist it must be recorded, that, boundless as were Malibran's resources, keen as was her intelligence, dazzling as was her genius, she never produced a single type in Opera for other women to adopt.—She passed over the stage like a meteor, as an apparition of wonder, rather than as one who, on her departure, left her mantle behind her for others to take up and wear.

LOUIS LABLACHE.

MUSICAL history contains no account of a bass singer so gifted by nature, so accomplished by art, so popular without measure or drawback, as Louis Lablache. For the most part, the lowest voice of the quartett has habitually been considered as useful rather than interesting—at least in serious Italian Opera. It is true that Mozart and other Germans have given it a prominence—this arising from the large supply of bass voices in their country, as compared with tenors.* It is as true that,

* Nothing is more curious, or at first sight more capricious, than the distribution of voices.—*Soprani* grow in every country; but the full, as compared with the light, *soprano*, is rare in France—whereas the latter is seldom to be found in Germany. Neither France nor Germany possesses the *contralto* voice in which Italy and England are so rich. The south has always been, *par excellence*, the birthplace of tenors, though England is now more productive than formerly. The deep bass, from Handel's time till our own, has always been a German speciality.

in Italian comic operas, the *buffo* has always been a prime favourite; though his occupation is more dependant on lively action and rapid delivery of the words, than on qualities strictly musical.—But the fact, so far as Lablache is concerned, remains as I have stated it. Never, at all events, in our memory, has the spell of indifference been so completely broken, as by this wonderful artist—taking him for "all in all," the most remarkable man whom I have ever seen in Opera.

The long-treasured notion of French voices being inexpressive and unpleasing in quality (as if our neighbours' country had not produced a Fodor, a Cinti, a Duprez), receives a heavy shock from the fact that Lablache was of French origin, though born in Naples,* and trained in the *Conservatorio della Pieta di Turchini* there. There, too, as M. Scudo's agreeable recollections of Italian singers assure us, he enjoyed the great advantage of the society and counsels of Madame Mericoffre (a rich banker's wife), known in Italy before her marriage as La Coltellini; utterly unknown in England (such was singers' fame then), although described as one of the finest artists belonging to the golden age of Italian singing. But, whatever position and training may have done for Lablache, Nature, bounteous in his organisation, had done

* A.D. 1791.

more. An organ more richly-toned or suave than his voice, was never given to mortal. Its real compass was about two octaves—from E to E. In the upper portion of the register four or five of his tones had a power which could make itself heard above any orchestral thunders, or in the midst of any chorus, however gigantic either might be. This remarkable force was not, as in the case of many singers, displayed on all occasions; but it was made to tell in right places, such as in the parts of the deaf and angry *Don Geronimo* ("Il Matrimonio"); or of *Oroveso*, the Druid Priest, in "Norma," (from which Bellini repeated its effect, in "I Puritani,") with prodigious and resistless lustre—put forth, as it was, without stint, or the slightest apparent difficulty.

Then, Lablache was gifted with a personal beauty to a rare degree. A grander head was never more grandly set on human shoulders;—and in his case Time, and the extraordinary and unwieldy corpulence which came with Time, seemed only to improve the Jupiter features, and to enhance their expression of majesty, or sweetness, or sorrow, or humour, as the scene demanded.

His mother-wit, too—his feeling for propriety in all that concerned his art, combined with genius, in the nicest proportion, were as remarkable as his beauty. One never felt on the stage how

huge he was.—His shoe was as big as a child's boat.—One could have clad the child in one of his gloves; and the child could almost have walked (though no Blondin) on his belt. But every article of his dress was so excellently fitted to its wearer, was worn so unconsciously, and was so thoroughly in agreement with all that it accompanied, that there was neither time nor temptation for comparison. I have seen a feat somewhat analagous performed in a totally opposite manner. On the stage, no one (save a Dantan) ever found out that M. Duprez was of small stature.—Nor was this all. One was never reminded by Lablache when he would be tragic, in touch, or turn, or tone —of the comic actor who gave way to the wildest Neapolitan *lazzi* when the artist chose to be comical. I think of his *Podesta* in "La Gazza Ladra," of his deaf *Don Magnifico* in "Il Matrimonio," of his *Doge* in "Marino Faliero," of his *Puritan Captain* in "I Puritani," as of so many different creatures, set apart one from the other, in no respect recalling the personality of him who still gave life and soul to all of them. Towards the close of his career, (as I shall have to record), at a time of life when anyone save himself would have grown dull and mechanical, he broke out into the personification of two beings as different as Shakespeare's *Caliban*, from Scribe's *Calmuck* in

M. Meyerbeer's Russian Opera—with a vivacity, a profound stage knowledge, and a versatility which were as rare as they were strongly marked.

But Lablache had qualities as sterling as others which were fascinating. Whether from organization, or from ambition, or from industry — matters little — this handsome young French-Neapolitan had got an amount of general, and genial, and solid musical culture, ere he appeared in England, which, for a singer, has been something with too little precedent. No music was strange to him; no one has so sung to compare with himself, *Leporello's* "*Madamina*" in Mozart's "Don Juan;"—or the tough air devised for *Mephistopheles*, from Spohr's "Faust," known by its Italian words as "*Va sbramando.*" The only time that I had an opportunity of drawing near the great Palestrina music (for ever talked about—never heard) was at one of our Ancient Concerts. At this Lablache's perfect acquaintance with the great Roman style—his marvellous voice, and, little less marvellous, his power of sustaining and animating his comrades without bearing them down—afforded a distinct idea of how such music might be sung, and how (when well sung) it might move, impress, and exalt those who heard it as a portion of a rite.

Thus much by way of general character of one

of the greatest musicians and artists ever seen or heard on the stage, or in the orchestra.—The life, the vigour, the variety thrown by him into new characters, till he died; the consummate musical skill with which he completed every task that he undertook, for the score of years which followed his appearance, will be told in the sketch of the events of the seasons as they passed.

THE YEAR 1831.

OPERAS.

"Il Pirata," "La Sonnambula."*—*Bellini.* "Il Matrimonio."—*Cimarosa.* "Anna Bolena."*—*Donizetti.* "Medea."—*Meyer.* "L'Ultimo Giorno di Pompei."*—*Pacini.* "Il Barbiére," "Ricciardo e Zoraide," "La Cenerentola," "Semiramide," "Otello."—*Rossini.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Sigl-Vespermann.* Fanny Ayton. Wood.* Méric Lalande. Rubini.* Pasta. Beck.*—MM. David.* Curioni. Rubini.* De Begnis. Santini. E. Seguin.* Lablache.

BALLETS.

"Kenilworth."*—"Flore et Zephyre."—"La Bayadere."*

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Montessu. Brocard. Taglioni.—M. Perrot.

THE YEAR 1831.

THE list of the performers and singers who were presented in the year 1831, of itself bespeaks a time of transition—which is rarely a time of prosperity. The power of Signor Rossini's spell was, for the moment, beginning to weaken as rapidly as if four out of the five of his operas performed had not that lasting vigour and beauty which belongs only to works of genius such as his. "Ricciardo e Zoraide," compared with them, is weak; and yet contains one trio, "*Cruda sorte*," the best movement of which helped to set a pattern to many a contemporary,* and to almost

* The figure of this is one of Signor Rossini's favourite figures, used to its greatest effect in the quartett, "*Ciel il mio labbro*," "Bianca e Faliero," and the incomparable *finale* to the third act, added to his "Mosè," for Paris. Perhaps some indication of it is to be found in the operas of Paër, from whom Signor Rossini improved much—compare his overture to "Tancredi" with Paër's to "Sargino." But those who have borrowed from Signor Rossini—as Signor Mercadante, in the well-known duett, "*Ah non lasciarmi*" from "Andronico," (Malibran's *last* duett); as Signor Verdi in the

every subsequent Italian composer—Bellini alone excepted.

For awhile, however, the new composers were received timidly. "Anna Bolena," brought hither under the protection of Madame Pasta's royal robes, was permitted, rather than admitted—though in this historical English opera might be discerned something of Donizetti's own; and though three of the characters—those of the *Queen* (Pasta), *Percy* (Rubini), and *Henry the Eighth* (Lablache), were played and sung to perfection.—Donizetti, however, was not an utter stranger here. A duett of his, introduced into a *pasticcio* opera by Bochsa, called "I Messicani," had, a season or two earlier, excited attention. But he was credited with small individuality by those who then ruled public opinion. So, it is curious to recollect how Bellini's second opera, introduced here, (also by Madame Pasta), "La Sonnambula," was treated on its introduction with contempt; the want of science on the part of its composer dwelt on—and that which is true in expression, and which has kept the opera alive—utterly overlooked. It may have been that, possibly, truth in expression was not then much

screaming *stretto* which ends the first act of "Il Trovatore" —have not followed his, and Handel's, example, in enriching with some new beauty that which they have appropriated.

cared for by those who frequented our Italian opera.—The time of Donizetti and Bellini, though at hand, was still to come.

A third Italian composer, already of some home note—living and writing in 1860—fared, and has always fared, worse in England than the two composers just mentioned.—Signor Pacini was not unknown here; for a comic opera, by him, "La Schiava in Bagdad," had been performed some years earlier, the *rondo finale* of which—a varied air with *violin obbligato*—survives to this day as a show-song. This contempt is the more singular, because Signor Pacini has shown in such tunes distinct originality. Three or four of his airs of parade are admirable, and his own—let me instance "*Il soave e bel contento*" ("Niobe"), and "*Lungi dal caro ben*" (I forget from what opera), in the last movement of which there is an early example of those syncopations which have been since so largely used and abused by the Riccis, Lillos, Coppolas of modern Italy, and, most of all, by Signor Verdi.—Yet, in spite of this claim as a melodist, not one opera by Signor Pacini (there are eighty, or thereabouts, by this time—a "Medea" among the number) has kept the stage for a month in London, or in Paris.

Among the female singers of the year 1831, the only Italian was Madame Pasta. There were two new tenors, however; one of whom must be

spoken of from testimony, the other dwelt on from recollection. The first was David—the son of the elder David, an artist of great renown some seventy years ago, who had formed Nozzari (another tenor, described by all having Neapolitan recollections as remarkable for brilliancy and grandeur), and his son, also. The latter rose to a great reputation in Italy. I have listened to travellers, who heard David the younger at home, when in his prime; and who have spoken of him with rapture, as a sort of Italian Garcia, as a man not endowed with a grateful voice, but whose musical science and natural spirits combined, were limitless in their effect—who could sometimes, shock, but oftener carry away, his audiences into transports. He was one of Signor Rossini's Neapolitan troop in the days when the incomparable "Otello" was written; but he crossed the Alps too late, after he had passed the age of forty years, to assault a public habitually averse to every foreign thing that *seems* extravagant (we tolerate any extravagance that conceals itself in our own nationality)—prepared, probably, for ovations—possibly somewhat contemptuous of a rude northern audience.—His voice was found to be worn and nasal; his animation was considered as mere caricature; his facility was rated as so much frippery. "When he came to this country," says Lord Mount Edgecumbe in his "Musical Reminiscences," "he was *passè*; and

his voice had become so unsteady that he was obliged to disguise its defects by superfluity of ornaments and passages." The amateur quoted, it may be remarked, was one of the old school, who never heartily recognised Signor Rossini as an Italian conversant with the true opera style. In any event, Signor David had no success either in London or in Paris. In one of his favourite operas, "L'Ultimo Giorno," by Signor Pacini, he was unlucky as having to sing with Mrs. Wood—Miss Paton—who, whatever might be her merits, did not number among them any knowledge of the modern Italian style.

Of the other Southern tenor, who appeared in the same year Signor David, and who never, thenceforward, lost his hold on England, there is more to be said presently.

In the chronicles of the *Ballet*, another example of the taste of the time is to be found in the presentation of M. Auber's "Le Dieu et la Bayadere" (a ballet opera, it is true) with all the opera left out. The luxurious Oriental grace of Mdlle. Taglioni, the dancing girl who lured a divinity (as Goethe's ballad assumes) was as remarkable as her Swiss dancing in Signor Rossini's "*Tyrolienne*" had been fresh, sprightly—anything but morally vulgar. One of the best of Chalon's opera portraits —unique as a collection, in their taste and appre-

ciation of the world portrayed—remains to bring her fascinations more clearly before the eyes than words, were they as winged as her own feet, could do.

The other new *ballet* of 1831, "Kenilworth," is noticeable as having introduced, for the first time, the name of one to whom music in England owes a greater debt than has yet been owned—I mean, Signor Costa. This was his first step on a domain in which he has since walked steadily forward, as only (in England) an upright and a competent man can do, supposing the walk prolonged through a life. His music to "Kenilworth" may be marked as the beginning of the solitary European musical reputation which has ever been made by an unknown foreigner in England—and in England alone.

GIAMBATTISTA RUBINI.

Of Rubini*—"king of tenors," as he was called on the Continent, and whose name became "a household word" in England among all opera-frequenters—I shall offer a separate study. As a singer, and nothing beyond a singer, he is the only man of his class who deserves to be named in these pages as an artist of genius. No one, in my experience, so merely and exclusively a singer as he was, so entirely enchanted our public, so long as a shred of voice was left to him;—no one is more affectionately remembered. His memory is, if possible, more prized than he himself was—fascinating though his sole admitted successor among Italian tenors has been.

Rubini's career in this country was marked by yearly progress in public affection more signally than any of his brother or sister artists. There

* Born at Bergamo, 1795.

were peculiarities to which we had to habituate ourselves. He was in no respect calculated to please the eye; for the openness of his countenance could not redeem the meanness of features impaired by small-pox. His figure was awkward; he dressed as any one else pleased, without a thought of his own as to taste, character, or picturesque effect—(in this how different to his successor!). He rarely tried to act, the moment of the curse in the contract-scene of "Lucia" being the only attempt of the kind that I can call to mind. The voice and the expression were, with him, to "do it all."

Before, however, Rubini, came to England his voice had contracted that sort of thrilling or trembling habit, then new here, which of late has been abused *ad nauseam*. It was no longer in its prime —hardly capable, perhaps, of being produced *mezzo-forte* or *piano*; for which reason he had adopted a style of extreme contrast betwixt soft and loud, which many ears were unable, for a long period, to relish. After a time these vehemences (in themselves vicious) were forgotten for the sake of the transcendant qualities by which they were accompanied, though in the last years of his reign they were exaggerated into the alternation of a scarcely-audible whisper and a shout; and it was said, not untruly, that it would be hardly possible

to form any idea of a new tenor part were it presented for the first time by Rubini, so largely did memory and knowledge of his intentions aid his public. Further, he was to be easily surpassed by every one in his declamation. Here and there (as in the garden scene in "Othello" with *Iago*) he roused himself to give point and passion to his recitative. But such an awakening was exceptional, since, for the most part, he went through this part of his task with correct accent, but without any remarkable intelligence—in this respect an utter contrast to M. Duprez. One remembers Rubini not by this or by the other character, but by his songs. Yet more, his taste in ornament was often questionable. His facility was apt to tempt him into enormous *roulade cadenzas* which had little variety. In *Paolino's* great song, "*Pria che spunti*" ("Il Matrimonio"), he revelled in embroideries of the phrase in retarded time which occurs just before the close, which, however ingenious and wonderful as vocal displays, I always felt to be superabundant.

The most enthusiastic admirers of Rubini cannot dispute the truth of these characteristics; the fact being, that the idol of the public made them all forgotten and forgiven by his excessive vocal finish, and by a geniality of expression that was resistless.—There was never an artist who seemed so

thoroughly and intensely to enjoy his own singing —a persuasion which cannot fail to communicate itself to his audiences.—Again, there was never an artist more sure of his own effects than Rubini. He would walk through a good third of any given Opera languidly, giving the notes correctly, and little more;—in a duett, blending his voice intimately with that of his partner (in this he was unsurpassed); but when his own moment arrived, there was no longer coldness or hesitation,—but a passion, a fervour, a putting forth to the utmost of every resource of consummate vocal art and emotion, which converted the most incredulous, and satisfied those till then disposed to treat him as one whose reputation had been overrated.—As the singer of one song, who has equalled Rubini?—whether the song was "*Vivi tu*" in "Anna Bolena," or his air "*Tutto e sciolto*" in the second act of "La Sonnambula," or his *bravura* in the second act of Donizetti's "Marino Faliero," or his "*A te o cara*" in "I Puritani," or his "*Il mio tesoro*" in "Don Giovanni," or his scene from Signor Costa's "Malek Adhel" (containing that resplendent song, "*Tiranno cadrai*," which no creature to come, in our time, may be ever able to attempt). These songs did not create a success for him so much as an ecstasy of delight in those who heard them. The mixture of musical finish with excitement which they displayed, has never been equalled within such limits, or on

such conditions, as the career of Rubini afforded. He ruled the stage by the mere art of singing more completely than any one—woman or man—has been able to do in my time. He had as many devoted admirers of the fair sex (of both sexes) as if he had been an Adonis—people ready to swear that his voice did not vibrate—to pour out their homage in sonnets—to maintain that he was an original and vigorous actor—that his declamation admitted of no improvement—he being all the while merely an honest, homely man, with few graces of manner, and none of that natural quickness which stands many of his countrymen in the stead of culture: a little vain—and who can wonder?—but not offensively so.

In one wise respect, Rubini did not resemble the majority of tenors—in foolishly flinging away the treasure which he had amassed by his songs. He is understood to have left behind him one of the largest fortunes ever gained on the Opera stage. The traditions of his method died with him. He may be said to be the last of the remarkable company of Italian tenors for whom Signor Rossini wrote; and, compared with whom, the best of those we hear to-day, nine out of ten, with finer natural voices than his, are incomplete, unsatisfactory; and whose reign in favour is brief, as it deserves to be.

SIGNOR ROSSINI'S OPERAS.

CHARACTERISTICS.

HERE, as belonging to a year of transition—to the temporary wane of Signor Rossini's popularity, and to his final retirement from composition for the stage—some remarks on the greatest musical genius of southern Europe are not unseasonable.

The world is only beginning to appreciate this genius at its real value.—Yet that Signor Rossini, on his first appearance, intoxicated the general public as no other composer, earlier or later, has done, is equally true. The vivacity of his style, the freshness of his melodies, the richness (for an Italian) of his combinations, the room and verge afforded to the singers, make up a whole, in comparison with which the brightest splendours of Cimarosa, and Paisiello, and Paër (to whom Signor Rossini is indebted for many of his forms)

are but so many faded and pale emanations from luminaries of a second order.

There is no such luxury of beauty in any former Italian writer. I have never been able to understand why this should be contemned as necessarily false and meretricious—why the poet may not be allowed the benefit of his own period, and his own manner—why a lover of architecture is to be compelled to swear by the *Dom* at Bamberg, or by the Cathedral at Monreale,—that he must abhor and denounce Michael Angelo's Church on the Baths of Diocletian at Rome—why the person who enjoys "Il Barbiére," is to be denounced as frivolously faithless to Mozart's "Figaro"—and as incapable of comprehending "Fidelio,"—because the last act of "Otello," and the second of "Guillaume Tell," transport him into as great an enjoyment (after its kind)—as do the duet in the cemetery, betwixt *Don Juan* and *Leporello*, and the "Prisoner's Chorus."—How much good genial pleasure has not the world lost in music, owing to this pitting of styles one against the other!—Your true traveller will be all the more alive to the beauty of Nuremburg, because he has looked out over the "Golden Shell" at Palermo; nor delight in Rhine and Danube the less, because he has seen the glow of a southern sunset over the broken bridge at Avignon.

To some such unfair construction as that typified in the above paragraph, was Rossini subjected by "the judges" of opinion, so-called, who ruled during the noon-tide of his popularity. That was held to be a mere passing madness, which could not last. The old amateurs who delighted in the delicate music of Paisiello, and the clear merriment of Cimarosa, pronounced the works of the young Pesarese master overcharged, out of taste,—and were not to be charmed by the fascinations of his melody, which no composer has poured forth in such delicious abundance—or by his exquisite and new concerted effects, as in "Il Turco," "Cenerentola," "Otello," "La Gazza,"—in every Opera from his pen.—They declared, and declared truly, that he had borrowed from other composers largely —from Haydn in his "*Zitti, Zitti*" ("Barbiére"), from Paër, from Generali—but what of that? They might just as fairly have railed against Shakespeare, because he quoted Plutarch and Hollinshed verbatim;—or against Handel, who scrupled not to appropriate any material that suited his purpose for the moment—having forgotten what a gorgeous treasure of originality remains to each of the three when every debt has been owned to the uttermost!—We are *now* aware of the glow, the colour, the emotion thrown into Italian Opera by Signor Rossini, as compared with his predecessors; but the purists,

thirty-five years ago, saw none of these things—none of the enrichment and enlargement brought into his art by the master — without any such innovations as imply destruction. They resigned themselves, with a sort of fastidious self-pity, to the enthusiasm of the hour,—as wise men will to a passing frenzy,—preferred to talk of the composers and singers whom they had thoroughly delighted in when they were young, in the days when Art was Art indeed—quiet and select, however beautiful,—not a delirious orgy, which could only intoxicate those feeble-brained and the hot-blooded folk who courted intoxication.—In a humour such as this, were the Operas of Signor Rossini treated by such English amateurs of music as Lord Mount-Edgecumbe and his contemporaries.

They had also to run the gauntlet of criticism, totally different in argument and spirit. At the time of their sudden outburst, the world of Europe was beginning, also, to waken to the solid and lasting claims of the great writers of the German school. Mozart was comparatively unhackneyed; Beethoven was just beginning to pierce the sympathies of the imaginative and enterprising (in spite of the imperfect execution of his works).—Weber had got hold of a fresher stage than that of Italy, by the fascination of a wild and popular nationality. There is more to master in the music

of all these three men than in that of Signor Rossini. Germany was newer than Italy. Orchestral art was then in the first freshness of its youth; and hence the sagacious, the scientific, and the sour, set their faces against the facile author of "Il Barbiére," as the spoiled idol of fashion, as a mere flimsy tune-spinner, whose seductions (supposing any one willing to be honestly seduced) must prove transient, palling, unreal. When the composer was in England, singing at Marlborough House for H.R.H. the Prince Leopold, or under the wing of the Duke of Wellington (a man as genuine in his musical amateurship, as in everything he set himself to study or to do), it was a fashion with the narrow (let me say, the pedantic) members of the English profession—then proud to be able to comprehend German music—to show their pride by depreciating the newest and greatest of the Italians. There were such things as good and cultivated Englishmen who, on principle, when Signor Rossini entered one music shop, repaired to another. So that this unprecedented Italian popularity of his was not without its counter-check, not only in London, but in every metropolis on this side of the Alps. Even when he consented to attach himself to the Opera of Paris for a time, he himself (subtlest among the subtle, most experienced among the experienced) found it well to change

his manner—to be more careful, to attend more closely to finish—as his Operas, "Le Siége de Corinthe," "Le Comte Ory," "Moise," and last, and greatest of all, "Guillaume Tell," attest.

Another cause may be ascribed for the pause of Signor Rossini's popularity besides the newly-acquired importance of what may be called the scientific school of stage composition. It is wonderful that one so far in advance of his age as Signor Rossini should have consented to waste his genius on subjects so utterly unworthy of it as are the majority of his opera-books. Considered as a series, their want of dramatic interest is perplexing and remarkable—so much so, as to have suggested to sagacious persons the idea, that the composer of "Tancredi" and "Otello" could not treat dramatic passion and situation, and was nothing when he was not sensually musical. No folly more baseless ever presented itself to fantastic spinner of theories. It would be difficult to name any more forcible example of musical expression than the third act of "Otello"—than the apparition scene in "Semiramide"—than the second act of "Guillaume Tell;" or (to change the humour) than "Il Barbiére," from its first to its last note. Then, for colour, what can exceed in freshness certain scenes of "La Donna del Lago?"—in intensity, the Plague of Darkness in "Mosé?"

Evidences of power without limit present themselves in the music of this great genius. That such power has been, in his case, not unaccompanied by a self-disregard closely trenching on cynicism, it is, unhappily, impossible to question; and this may have been crossed by a vein of self-assertion amounting to arrogance. Too inattentive to the march of time, the musician may have fancied that he could retain, after fascinating, his theatrical audience by the spell of music alone.

That this was a mistaken idea (supposing idea it was), the event proved. Dramas weaker in music than Signor Rossini's kept the stage, for the sake of the scope afforded to the actors. *Medea*, *Romeo*, the shame-crazed father in "Agnese," the peasant *Nina* of Paisiello's opera, even during the time of his early triumph, still attracted such great singers, as were conscious that powers of personation were strong within them. This may explain what Signor Rossini is reported to have said concerning Madame Pasta—"She always sang false."—Her greatest victories were not in his music. Her dignified and knightly demeanour—it is true—her superb declamation, animated his "Tancredi." Her queenly grandeur of bearing relieved the lengthiness of the songs and duets in his "Semiramide." In "Otello," finding the part of *Desdemona*, throughout two-thirds of the opera, somewhat pale, she was

driven by her instincts towards what is terrible and impassioned in art—"to attempt" (her own modest phrase) the stormy and vindictive character of the Moor married "to the gentle lady;"—and, unsatisfactory as all such assumptions must be, her personation printed deep on the minds of those who saw it an impression of something fierce, masterful, Oriental, the like of which had hardly, till she came, been expressed in music. But one recollects Madame Pasta by her *Medea*, her *Romeo*, her *Norma*, her *Anna Bolena*. When she could be dramatic, the defects of intonation to which she was liable either disappeared, or were forgotten in the consummate union of vocal art with human emotion.

Thus, an assertion which at first sight may seem a paradox, if examined will prove to be tenable as a truth. The time on which Signor Rossini fell was unfortunate to the steady duration of his popularity—the more so since, owing to his indifference to what was passing in the world round him, he did not sufficiently provide for the exigencies of the hour. The phrase of "no man's enemy but his own" applies, in fullest force, to the direction given by this man of superb musical genius to his career.

Yet, after everything has been admitted and regretted, as a body of imperishable music, the operas of

Signor Rossini will endure so long as the art of Music lasts. Now when the heat of immediate partisanship has died out, musicians of every country can admit his wondrous grace, his fertility of invention,* his admirable treatment of the voice, his simple and effective taste in arrangement of the orchestra. He has already lived down some of his rivals and successors. He can never be made a model; neither can any man of spontaneous inspiration who owes so little to rule as he. The day may never come in which commentators will wrangle about his outer forms and inner meanings; but that every year as it flows on will deepen and ripen his fame, I no more doubt than that wood grows and water runs.

The strange, obstinate, retirement from creation of such an artist as Signor Rossini, in the prime of his powers—with "Guillaume Tell" just made, and myriads of fancies still unexpressed—has always reminded me of nothing so much as of the

* Let one example of this be mentioned:—the beginnings of his Overtures—to "Il Barbiére," to "l'Italiana," to "La Cenerentola," to "La Gazza," to "Otello," to "Semiramide," to "Le Siége de Corinthe," to "Guillaume Tell"—all how different one from the other—all how arresting to the listener, by the very first phrase! In this first requisite for a dramatic prelude, the Italian (though professedly no instrumental composer) ranks on a par with Beethoven and Weber. The three are followed, at a long interval, by M. Auber.

old story, true in the main, which, however, has been added to, and coloured, and lectured on, till small truth, it may be, is left in it—the story, I mean, of the man who left his wife in pique, without bidding her farewell, and who dwelt, for a long term of years, undiscovered, in a house on the opposite side of the street—long after her agony of wish to discover him had died out in blank hopelessness. After holding out for a certain time, pride forbade him to go home.

Who has ever weighed the strength of perversity—the self-punishment of the implacable?—or the comfort of their conviction, that if the outer world suffers by it, so much the better! Thus, it may be, that the perpetual reference to, and solicitude concerning, Signor Rossini, during the past thirty years—the anxiety to be allowed to hope that his last words were not said—the return to his best operas (in spite of their feeble stories), after one and another writer has been praised, become wearisome, and been laid by—may have amounted to so many incitements to persistence in the course of musical perversity, by which we have lost so much.—No stranger story is, at all events, recorded in the annals of Art, with respect to a genius who filled his own world with its glory, and then chose to vanish "not unseen."

THE YEAR 1832.

OPERAS.

(In Italian.)—"La Straniera."*—*Bellini.*—"L'Esule di Roma,"* "Olivo e Pasquale."*—*Donizetti.*—"Elisa e Claudio."—*Mercadante.*—"Agnese."—*Paer.*—"Gli Arabi."*—*Pacini.* "Otello," "Il Barbiére," "Pietro l'Eremita," "Elisabetta," "La Donna del Lago."—*Rossini.*—"La Vestale."*—*Spontini.* "Giulietta e Romeo."*—*Vaccài.*

(In German.)—"Macbeth."*—*Chelard.*—"Fidelio."—*Beethoven.*—"Don Juan."—*Mozart.*—"Der Freischütz."—*Weber.*

(In French.)—"Robert Le Diable."*—*Meyerbeer.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. de Meric.* Cinti-Damoreau.* Giuditta Grisi.* Rosa Mariani.* Schröeder-Devrient.* Schneider.*—MM. Winter.* Curioni. Donzelli. Haitzinger.* Nourrit.* Tamburini. Giubilei. Lablache. Pellegrini.* Galli.

BALLETS.

"La Somnambule."—"L'Anneau Magique."*

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Le Compte. Heberlè.* Brugnoli.*—M. Samengo.*

THE YEAR 1832.

THIS was a strange year:—in more than one respect important to the future of foreign Opera in England, however ruinous to the manager who adventured an amount of experiment so large as is shown in its table of contents. Not one in the list of Italian operas, old or modern, contented the public.—"L'Esule di Roma" made a certain mark in favour of Donizetti, because of a *terzetto*, which was found new; but the other novelties from the south fell dead in the hour of their appearance.—Spontini's grand French opera, "La Vestale," has never been suffered to exist in England, never having been here prepared with care enough to harmonize the barrenness of certain portions of the composer's setting of M. Jouy's drama with the musical grandeur of his strong scenes.

No Italian *prima donna* of first-class appeared. Giuditta Grisi failed to enchant her public: a

singer, however meritorious, with a harsh, limited voice, though with real dramatic intentions. Mde. Rosa Mariani, a *contralto*, who worked out her career on some five notes with great skill and small natural capability, came and went, and made no sign.

The leading woman of the Italian season, at its commencement, was a French lady, Madame de Meric; and later, the delicious artist born, Mademoiselle Cinthie Montalant, who sang in Italian opera as Mademoiselle Cinti, afterwards as Madame Cinti-Damoreau.

To the value, and cleverness, and skill, of Madame de Meric, as one able to carry out any part, whether it was one in Italian, or French, or German Opera, sufficient tribute has not been paid.—As to her countrywoman—among, and above, all the singers of her class—as an artist commanding boundless volubility without deep sentiment—charming by the delicious suavity of her voice, and by an easy variety of embellishment, which never, for an instant, seemed to be mannered or studied for—do I recollect Madame Cinti-Damoreau.—This admirable vocalist seems to have only wanted a steady direction of her fascinations to have controlled such world as waits on singing. But she quarrelled with the Grand Opera of Paris (after having been Signor Rossini's chosen heroine there); came and went in England and

America for a while; after at the Comic Opera of Paris, having given to M. Auber the heroines of his "Ambassadrice," and of that French "Barbiére," the "Domino Noir." She subsequently slipped out of sight and beyond ken, as no one so deliciously endowed and accomplished as she was should have done so early.

This was the year of Signor Tamburini's first appearance in England—if not an artist of genius, as a brilliant bass singer and actor, combining more attractive qualities than any other (save Lablache) who could be named. He was a singularly handsome man;—his voice was rich, sweet, extensive, and equal—ranging from F to F—two perfect octaves—and in every part of it entirely under control. His execution has never been exceeded, establishing him as one of the best singers of Signor Rossini's music.—No one since himself has so thoroughly combined grandeur, accent, florid embellishment, and solidity;—nor has approached him in such music as the *aria* "*Sorgete!*" from "Maometto," in the part of *Assur*, in "Semiramide;" of *Fernando*, in "La Gazza Ladra."—How admirable he was as one of a company we knew for many a year. His acting, whether tragic or comic, was sensible and spirited, if it did not show those flashes of passion or irresistible drollery which have since atoned for so much vocal imperfection in Signor

Ronconi. Something of high breeding was wanting to him when such a part as *Don Giovanni* had to be played; his pronunciation, too, of Italian became mannered and impure during his later years;—but as a brilliant artist of the great school of Italian opera-singers, who appeared during a great period, Signor Tamburini will not soon be forgotten. One importation after another has come across the Alps to interfere with or replace him, but always without success.

This was the year when (happy event for England!) the Italian orchestra was placed under the direction of Signor Costa.

The German performances claim separate notice; but, in addition to these, the theatre,—by way of a novelty, and when just about to close under circumstances of disappointment and ruin—introduced nothing less strange to England, less elaborate, and less costly, than "Robert le Diable," which, as the first of M. Meyerbeer's extraordinary French revelations, was, at that time, turning Paris crazy. In England some ill fortune, as will be seen, has always attended this opera, which has never been accepted as a favourite by our public. It is impossible to account for inconsistencies like these, frequent as they are in the world of Music.—In 1832, however, "Robert," with its piquant melodies, its daring stage effects, and magnificent in-

strumentation, had no chance of establishing itself in London; since it was only completely performed once—and then after insufficient rehearsal. The singers quarrelled with the management, and had to be replaced by inferior ones. The work was curtailed, and on it, given in this mutilated form, descended the curtain of the season 1832—a season of disasters, in which, nevertheless, there was something like a foretaste and prophecy of the performances which have since raised the Italian Opera at Covent Garden to a place of supremacy among the musical theatres of Europe.

GERMAN OPERA IN ENGLAND.

THE most noticeable feature of the year 1832 was the introduction to England of German Opera in its original form; and the effect of the experiment, which, in some respects, has proved alike important and lasting.

There are few subjects in art concerning which so many popular fallacies are current as German musical drama.—The range of its claims is much narrower than has been dreamed of, confusions having been largely fallen into, owing to the parentage of certain composers. This does not warrant classification of their music. Lulli, who settled the forms of opera for France, in the French taste, was Italian. Hasse, the Saxon, and Mysliweczek, the Bohemian, wrote Italian operas. The five operas of Gluck which keep the stage are assuredly French in every characteristic ("Orpheus" the least so). Mozart only fairly arrived

on the national ground when he wrote his "Zauberflöte" for a fäery theatre at Vienna (and this had imported its distinctive character from the *Extravaganzas* and *Commedie delle arte* of the South). The real serious German operas that can be named are the one by Beethoven—those left by Weber and Spohr—some by Dr. Marschner and Herr Lachner; and from these we must step at once to the much-canvassed productions of Herr Wagner. Many, even in the above narrow list, can be said only to exist, not to live, on the stage of their own country — because that has been fed from France. There is no need here to dwell on the works of a lighter style, as without character or reality or beauty, seeing that none of them has had the existence of half an hour of passing fashion in this island. Dittersdorf, Conradin Kreutzer, and (latest) Lortzing, are so many names next to unknown in England.

Though some small attempt had been made to present German operas some years earlier in London, consequent on the popularity of the version of "Der Freischütz," mutilated in English, it was not till Mr. Monck Mason held our Italian Opera-house in his hand, for the single season of 1832, that our untravelled folk were enabled to form an idea of the power or the peculiar characteristics of pure German opera.—"Fidelio," as given by artists "to

the manner born," amounted to a revelation. It was the solitary success of a management which was as disastrous as it was enterprising, and as such worthy of honourable commemoration.

A study of "Fidelio" has yet to be made, from more points of view than one. The book, of French origin, by M. Bouilly—the same dramatist who wrote "Les Deux Journées" for Cherubini—would be laughed to scorn if now-a-days presented to a composer or a manager. "No part for the tenor in the first act," would be the remark, fatal to its acceptance—as if one work was to be precisely like another, according to the same Chinese model of exactness! How stupid is such a fancy, all concerned in art have often and again had occasion to see of late.—"La Joie fait peur" of Mdme. de Girardin (which, if translated, would be simply, "How to break good news,") may keep the stage, by its close appeal to the universal human heart; long after the most subtly-devised devices and ingenious carpentries of M. Scribe have been laid aside for ever, as curiosities belonging to a past generation of toy-makers.

Belonging to the family of stories, the strength and simplicity of which defy cavil and time, is this story of "Fidelio," twice set—once by Gaveaux, once by Paër—before Beethoven took it in hand; after (so anecdote says) his bearish reception of

the Italian score, on the same being shown to him by its composer—if the tale be true—"I like your story," said he, "and will set it to music." The anecdote may concern the score of Gaveaux, not of Paër.—Beethoven certainly re-set a twice-told story, full of passion and reality.

On considering the music to which Beethoven set M. Bouilly's story, such fault as may be found with the opera of "Fidelio," as the music stands, is not to be charged against the unartificial disposition of the scenes, so much as on the rugged nature of the master, on his limited and uncomplying views in respect to vocal art, and on his want of sympathy for the capacity and charm of the voice, which he never showed when writing for instruments. There are no melodies in "Fidelio" comparable to those which exist in Beethoven's Symphonies, Quartetts, Pianoforte Sonatas. These are so symmetrical, as often to amount to the vulgar things called "tunes," which the transcendental Germans of to-day, of whom Beethoven has served for Prophet, do so contemptuously spurn, when they are met on the stage.* The

* Yet, that Beethoven could be as richly captivating in this branch of his art as any musician who ever lived, he showed in his stage music, as in his Choral Symphony and his Choral Fantasia. The Greek and the Turkish marches in his "Ruins of Athens,"—the "Hungarian Chorus" in his "King Stephen" (the last exquisite piece of music too little known) attest this sufficiently.

part of the heroine is one of extreme vocal difficulty wherever she is called on to appear alone, so much so as to preclude the possibility of much individual pathos being thrown into it. Even in the *adagio* of *Leonora's* great air, the best singer must be hampered by the florid *obbligato* accompaniment of horns—which but once in twenty times can be played correctly, so uncertain and hard to manage is the instrument. The singer must in this song reduce her individuality to that of an organ-stop. Again, there are pages in "Fidelio" which are weak and commonplace. The March is but colourless; the concerted *finale* end in the first act, during which the prisoners are returned to their cells, is, for Beethoven, uninteresting; and the grand closing scene of the opera begins and ends with phrases which, were they found elsewhere, might be treated with disparaging epithets.

Throughout the opera—need it be said?—the orchestral portion of "Fidelio" is sonorous, varied, original, and following the situations with a pertinence as wonderful as it is unobtrusive. But (two or three pieces set apart) the orchestra, the story, and the acting, are the first and main attractions of "Fidelio;" and the voice, which should be the protagonist in Opera—as declaiming musically—as leading the work from commencement to close, principal

and predominant, and most effective when its position is the best considered—comes after them as secondary and assistant—a permitted accessory, not an indispensable fascination.

Be these things as they may, the sensation produced by "Fidelio" in 1832 is not to be forgotten. The Italians, that year not very strong in muster, were fairly beaten out of the field by the Germans. The intense musical vigour of Beethoven's opera was felt to be a startling variety, wrought out, as it was, in its principal part by a vocalist of a class entirely new to England.

This was Madame Schröeder Devrient,* whose best character was *Leonora.* Within the conditions of her own school, she was a remarkable artist. She was a pale woman.—Her face—a thoroughly German one—though plain, was pleasing, from the intensity of expression which her large features and deep tender eyes conveyed.—She had profuse fair hair, the value of which she thoroughly understood—delighting, in moments of great emotion, to fling it loose with the wild vehemence of a Mœnad. Her figure was superb, though full, and she rejoiced in its display. Her voice was a strong *soprano*—not comparable in quality to other German voices of its class (those, for instance, of Madame Stockl-

* Born at Hamburg, in 1805.

Heinefetter, Madame Burde-Ney, Mademoiselle Tietjens)—but with an inherent expressiveness of tone, which made it more attractive on the stage than many a more faultless organ. Such training as had been given to it belonged to that false school, which admits of such a barbarism as the defence and admiration of "Nature-Singing." Why not as well speak of natural playing on the violin, or other instrument, which is to be brought under control? A more absurd phrase was never coined by ignorance conceiving itself sagacity. Why as well not have nature-civilization?—nature-painting?—nature-cleanliness? But on the rock of this difficulty, the German singers and German composers of voices have split.—A man whose fingers cannot control the strings would hardly have a second hearing, did he attempt instrumental music.—But a woman, supposing she can correctly flounder through the notes of a given composition, has been allowed, too contemptuously, to take rank as a singer.—Such a woman was not Sontag—neither, of later days, Mdlle. Lind.—The two had learned to sing—Madame Schröeder Devrient *not*.—Her tones were delivered without any care, save to give them due force. Her execution was bad and heavy. There was an air of strain and spasm throughout her performances—of that struggle for victory which never conquers.

But, then, as an actress, the devouring suspense of the disquieted wife, throughout the first half of the tale, enabled the German *Leonora* to exhibit all her passion of by-play, in judicious interpretation of the situation.—Her eyes, quickened by the yearnings of her heart, were everywhere; her quivering lip, even when her countenance was the most guarded, told how intensely she was listening. It was impossible to hear the "Prisoner's Chorus," as given by the Germans in London during that year, and to see the eager woman as she unclosed cell after cell, and ushered its ghastly tenants into the fresh air, questioning face after face, all in vain, —without tears. Nor less earnestly wrought up was her scene in the vault, ending with her rapturous embrace of the rescued captive, for whom she had waited so long, and dared so much. By no one has Madame Schröeder Devrient been equalled in this opera. In no other opera was she seen to such advantage—her fatal and sinister acting as the *Lady* in Chelard's "Macbeth" was hampered, in some measure, by the music; for this demanded an executive facility which she did not possess. Subsequently, she made the mistake of appearing in Italian opera; a season or two later attempted to sing in English, without having mastered the language, and lost her hold on our public. As years went on, she exaggerated every peculiarity

as a singer and as an actress. The last time I heard her in her own theatre at Dresden, her restlessness on the stage had reached a monopolising point of torment to every spectator;—so resolutely did she seem determined that no one else should be seen or attended to when she was in presence.

The tenor who played with her, Herr Haitzinger, a man of great German reputation, was a meritorious musician, with an ungainly presence and a disagreeable throaty voice—an actor whose strenuousness in representing the hunger of the imprisoned captive in the dungeon trenched closely on burlesque. How he patted his stomach, I well recollect. This, by the way, is a characteristic of the German theatre. The actors partake of stage meals with a gusto—not to say greediness—and a noisy obtrusive enjoyment, which hardly meets the taste of England or France.

But the principal feature of the German performance of "Fidelio" which marked an epoch in London, was the spirit and reality of the stage chorus — things till then totally unknown here. The rueful, shabby people who used to shout their easy Italian tunes out of tune, in meagre, motionless semi-circle—so many scarecrows, instead of singers—were in these German Operas replaced by a company of earnest folk, with stout voices (and those of the women fresh), who showed that they

took pride in their work by rendering the music, and all its lights and shades, with instant steadiness—and that they understood the scene, by the assistance their appropriate action afforded to every situation in which they took part. Their forcible and intelligent performances did not fall on deaf ears. The English people (since Handel's time, at least) have always cultivated a taste and relish for chorus singing. Their example was not lost. Year by year this most important feature in musical drama, which has been studied as such more and more closely by modern composers — German or not German—has excited increasing attention in this country, and to such good purpose, that we are now, as to excellence, in advance of the great theatres of Paris, Berlin, Vienna, or Milan. The spark, however, was laid to the tinder by the results obtained by M. Chelard, the conductor of these German operas, from his chorus-singers in "Fidelio."

THE YEAR 1833.

OPERAS.

"Il Pirata," "Norma,"* "I Montecchi."*—*Bellini.* "Anna Bolena."—*Donizetti.* "Medea."—*Mayer.* "Le Nozze di Figaro," "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "Agnese."—*Paër.*—"La Cenerentola," "Matilda di Shabran," "Il Barbiére," "La Gazza Ladra," "Semiramide," "Tancredi," *Rossini.*

(In German.)—"Fidelio."—*Beethoven.* "Der Freischütz."—*Weber.* "Zampa."*—*Herold.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Boccobadati.* De Meric. Schiasetti.* Nina Sontag.* Cinti-Damoreau. Pasta. Pirscher.*—MM. Donzelli. Rubini. Tamburini. De Begnis. Giubilei. Galli.

BALLETS.

"Faust."*—"Flore et Zephyre."—"Nathalie."—"Inez de Castro."*—"La Sylphide."*—"La Bayadere."

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Leroux. Montessu. Teresa and Fanny Elssler.* Taglioni—M. Perrot.

THE YEAR 1833.

THOUGH the list of operas performed in 1833 be long, the performances fell short of giving entire satisfaction. Of the novelties by Bellini introduced, only one was relished—for the critics of the hour flouted "Norma" as a poor work. Nor till a year or two later did that opera take its place among the stock-favourites of England. None of the new singers became popular.—The German company was made up of mediocrities—the men not being worth naming: the sensation of 1832 was, accordingly, not repeated.—The glory of Madame Pasta already showed signs of waning: she steadily began her evening's task half a tone too flat. Her acting, was more powerful and striking than ever —if that could be. This, however, was her last season, of being the presiding divinity of the opera. She only sang here on an engagement, once again, after an interval of some years; with regard to which appearance I shall speak in detail.—This,

too, was the season of Malibran's few last Italian performances in England. She had astounded rather than edified our fastidious *dilettanti*, by singing in English at Drury Lane;* and thenceforth, a sort of pique grew up between our despotic aristocracy, and the wayward Spanish *prima donna*, —and "Semiramide" was sung for the last time by herself, Madame Pasta, and Signor Tamburini, then in his prime—to an empty theatre.

Such life and excitement, as were to be found in the Opera House in 1833, belonged to a world more attractive to many of its frequenters than the world of music—that of *ballet*. The year which showed us "La Sylphide," with Madame Taglioni in the prime and perfection of her grace, which introduced an artist so incomparable, in another style, as Madame Fanny Elssler, was, in its way, a memorable one.

"La Sylphide" marks a ballet epoch, as a work that introduced an element of delicate fantasy and fairyism into the most artificial of all dramatic exhibitions—one which, to some degree, poetized it. After "La Sylphide," were to come "La Fille du Danube," and "Giselle," (containing some of Adam's best music,) "L'Ombre," and a score

* In an English version of "La Sonnambula,"—in an operetta by M. Chelard, called "The Students of Jena,"—and, absolutely, as *Count Belino* in "The Devil's Bridge."

of ballets, in which the changes were rung on Naiad and on Nereid life—on the ill-assorted love of some creature of the elements for some earthy mortal. The purity and etherial grace of Mdlle. Taglioni's style doubtless suggested the opening of this vein, as it also founded a school of imitators. Then her mimic powers, however elegant, were limited. Her face had few changes. Her character-dances, as in "Guillaume Tell," "La Bayadere," were new and graceful; but their seduction, piquancy, and national chagrin were to be outdone. When she touched our cold English ground, however, *The Sylph* excited as much enthusiasm as the most idolized songstress can now do. Yet those were days in which the pretensions of the most favourite of favourites were trifling, as compared with those of their inferiors now. While diamond bracelets were flung to her on the stage by magnificent patrons of the art—while the European world of play-goers was ringing with the fascinations of the young Swedish artist—she was contented (alternately with one of those creations which filled the theatre,) to take such accessory parts as that of the Swiss peasant in Signor Rossini's opera, or the ghostly Abbess in M. Meyerbeer's "Robert."

It was long and late before the star of Mdlle. Taglioni waned; before her lightness failed her—before it was whispered that there might be some

little sameness in her effects. Even then its wane was accelerated by the growing success in the dancing world of a rival in a style, and of a humour totally different — Mademoiselle Fanny Elssler.—This last-named woman of genius had to "bide her time" both in Paris and London. Our public, at least, has not room in its heart for two sensations at once. Those who were captivated by the tenderness and the elegance —even when her flights were the boldest—of Mdlle. Taglioni, maintained that there was too little of the *semi-reducta Venus* in the presentations of the young, fresh, and bold dancer from Vienna.—As to personal attractions, there could be no comparison between the two women.—Mdlle. Elssler's dignified and triumphant beauty of face and form would have made her remarked whatever dress she wore—in whatever world she appeared. There was more, however, of the *Circe* than of the *Diana* in her smile: —a quiet if not imperious consciousness of power and accomplishment — a *bravura* of style in her intercourse with the public, which was too keen for some eyes to bear. A mistress of the grand and artificial art of dancing, she possessed many more resources than Mdlle. Taglioni. She had studied Heberle closely—she had gone through every species of exercise which can give firmness and suppleness, and the completest concord among

all parts of the body — whether the same was in rapid motion, or flung into those unnaturally graceful and conventional postures, which in dancing astonish rather than allure the uninitiated. The exquisite management of her bust and arms (one of the hardest things to acquire for the dancing) set her apart from everyone whom I have seen before or since. Nothing in execution was too daring for her—nothing too pointed.—If Madame Taglioni flew — she flashed.—The one floated on to the stage like a Nymph—the other showered every sparkling fascination round her like a Sorceress, with that abundance which finds enjoyment in its own exercise. Her versatility, too, was complete. She had every style—every national humour—under her feet,—she could be Spanish for the Spaniards; or Russian for the northerns; or Neapolitan for those who love the delirious *Tarantella*, with as much variety as certainty.

The above qualities, however, though great, may be numbered among those technical ones which every thoroughly-trained dancer is expected to exhibit, as a matter of course. But beyond these Mdlle. Elssler as an actress commanded powers of high and subtle rarity—powers unsuspected during the period when her rival was Queen of the stage, when invention was set to work principally to fit

her with proper occupation. It was not till "The Gipsy" was produced that Mdlle. Fanny Elssler's full genius was known. This ballet, given on a reduced scale in London (and here best known as the theme of Mr. Balfe's "Bohemian Girl"), as seen in Paris, was a performance never to be forgotten. Much of the lovely music of Weber's "Preciosa" was used in it:—the *Bolero* which opens his Overture was allotted to a scene where the gipsy girl compels her sulky mates to dance. When she appeared on the stage of Paris—the folk lay couched in fifties, huddled together in their wild and picturesque clothes—as only the French stage-managers know how to group forms and colours.—How she moved hither and thither, quick and bright as a torch, lighting up one sullen heap of tinder after another—gradually animating the scene with motion—till at last the excited rout of vagabonds trooped after her with the wild vivacity of a chorus of Bacchanals—made a picture of many pictures, the brightness and spirit of which stand almost alone, in the gallery or similar ones. There have been *Gitanas*, *Esmeraldas*, *Mignons* by the score, but no Gipsy to approach Mdlle. Fanny Elssler.

In the next act of the same ballet came the scene of the minuet danced by the heroine to gain time, and to distract attention from her lover in

concealment hard by, whose life was perilled. Lord Byron, when speaking of his own dramas, has subtly dwelt on the power of suppressed passion. Few things have been seen more fearful than the cold and measured grace of Mdlle. Fanny Elssler in this juncture — than the manner in which every step was watched, every gesture allowed its right time—so that neither flurry nor faltering might be detected—than the set smile—the vigilant ear—the quivering lip controlling itself. It is in moments like these that Genius rises above talent. It was by representations such as these that Mdlle. Fanny Elssler gradually established a fame among the few as well as the many, which could have been built up by no *pirouettes* nor *entrechats*, but in right of which she is enrolled among the great dramatic artists of the century.

In the year 1833, an attempt was made, in "Inez di Castro," to introduce one of those exhibitions of which the Italians are so fond, a "ballet of action," in which the impassioned story, told in dumb show, is the main matter—not the serious or sprightly dancing to garnish certain scenes. Signor Cortesi's ballet had no success: was not understood here—indeed, it may be questioned whether, even had it been supported by La Pallarini herself (that wonderful tragic mime commemorated by so many Southern travellers during the

early part of this century), any such entertainment would have borne transportation into this Northern clime of ours.

A monograph on ballet-music is much wanted: for the interest and importance of the subject have been too universally overlooked by writers on our Art. Such influence as the dance with its rhythms has exercised on lyrical poetry and music, has never been sufficiently considered, though there is hardly a fancy in musical composition which may not be traced back to it. A mere list of the works of sterling and peculiar value written for the express use of dancing, and to accompany action, would be a contribution to the history of Art, as suggestive as it is valuable. We should find in the catalogue Gluck, as pioneer to Mozart, by his "Dom Juan,"—Beethoven, the rigid and rugged, as regarded anything that might be called seductive, not merely conceding to a dance-theatre his "Prometheus," but, as I have said, in such accessory music to drama as his Kotzebue's "Ruins of Athens," and to "King Stephen," giving out some of his freshest inspirations. The Hungarian chorus (with ballet?) in the latter is not beaten in its easy appeal to the ear, and delicious elegance of melody, by the "*Tyrolienne*," in "Guillaume Tell."—Then, there is Weber's "Preciosa" music—shadowed out in his earlier

"Sylvana"—dance-music of extraordinary beauty yet as inexorable in form as the veriest French *galoppe*. If we leave the renowned men of what is called classical art, and descend to such mere ballet-makers as the Count de Gallenberg, whose "Anneau Magique" is noted on a foregoing page; as Herr Schneitzöffer, who wrote the music to the delicious "Sylphide,"—it may be found that there is much to delight in, something to learn.—The prelude to the second act of this faëry ballet, during which the curtain rises on a wood-scene, is full of delicious poetry, mystery, and melody, and attractive sound. Again, those who have mixed ballet with opera, according to the French taste, such as Rameau (in the well-known chorus from "Les Indes Galantes") — Gluck, whose dance-music, whether choral or without voices, is wondrously alluring—Signor Rossini, M. M. Auber, and Meyerbeer, have, in this portion of their stage-music, shown as much of the sacred fire of inspiration, if not of the "midnight oil" of science, as in the portions devoted by them to the setting out of words by sounds. We have lived into a period when everything that pleases is scouted by the severe and unimaginative, who conceive themselves transcendentalists. Possibly, then, such a protest as the above, giving creditable exam-

ples in favour of melody, symmetry, and beauty (if even the same be not "improved" by the devices and designs of counterpoint), may not be misplaced.

THE YEAR 1834.

OPERAS.

(In Italian.)—"La Sonnambula."—*Bellini.* "Anna Bolena."—*Donizetti.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "La Gazza Ladra," "Semiramide,". "Il Barbiére," "Otello," "L'Assedio di Corinto,"* "La Donna del Lago."—*Rossini.*

(In German.)—"La Dame Blanche."*—*Boieldieu.* "Das Unterbröchene Opferfest."*—*Winter.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Féron-Glossop.* Kynterland.* Salvi.* Caradori-Allan. Giulia Grisi.* E. Seguin.* Degli Antoni.*—MM. Curioni. Rubini. Ivanoff.* Schmetzer.* Tamburini. Zuchelli. Giubilei.

BALLETS.

"La Sylphide. "La Bayadere." "Le Sire Huon."* "Armide."* "Massaniello."

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Taglioni. Duvernay.* Teresa and Fanny Elssler. —M. Perrot.

THE YEAR 1834.

THE prosperity of this year, so far as Opera was concerned, was referable to the appearance of Mdlle. Grisi, and to the immediate place of supremacy—then less easy to conquer than now—which she assumed on a stage, from which a Pasta and a Malibran had only just vanished. The small number of operas produced tells of itself a tale of the complete success of the new singer's fascinations. There was only one novelty—the Italian version of "Le Siége de Corinthe," by Signor Rossini, arranged for the Opera of Paris from his "Maometto,"—with some important additions.

The world has been too willing to let this work go,—perhaps, because the cause of Greek liberty, to which it was meant to appeal, soon ceased to warm anyone: the dull arrangement of the story, too, precluding its finding a place among such dramas "for all time," as are "Massaniello," and "Les Hu-

guenots." Yet "Le Siége de Corinthe" contains music too noble to be forgotten:—first among these the Overture. A Rossinian prelude though this be—and as such to be derided by classical souls, who are enamoured of many a piece of unidea'd German dullness—there is a grandeur in the introduction—there is a burning and brilliant force in the *allegro*, only in character and vivacity outdone by the prelude to "Guillaume Tell."—The quick-step forming the second subject of the *allegro* is more dependant for its character on rhythm than most of its master's themes; but the spirit with which it is wrought up is rare—even for Signor Rossini.—Then, where is there a bass *aria* of parade which can compare with the entry of *Maometto?*—especially if it be given with such temperance and florid grandeur combined, as Signor Tamburini could throw into it. Since himself, no one has been able to sing this air properly, owing to the modern idea of accomplishment, which now denounces a shake as beneath the dignity of a hero,—and a *roulade* to be nothing less meretricious than a dancer's *pirouette*.—The opera also contains a grand and spirited duett, betwixt bass and *soprano*, which was admirably sung by the two principal artists—a Turkish chorus, which may be cited with those of Mozart's "Seraglio,"—and the banner-*solo* and chorus, added (I think)

for Paris — the poorest of which movements would, in this day of dearth, sound like marvels of fresh fancy. The opera, however, had not, nor has anywhere had, a long life. The world had not in those days ceased to measure Signor Rossini by himself.

During this year, 1834, Bellini, or rather his "La Sonnambula," began to creep on in public favour. This change may, in part, have been owing to the performances of that opera in English by Malibran; but doubtless, too, the simple interest of the story, and the artless expressiveness of the music, were found to have in them something permanent, entitling the young Sicilian to rescue it from the wholesale contempt which had been heaped on him.—At the close of the season the part of *Amina* was taken, not successfully, by Mdlle. Grisi—earlier it had been presented by Madame Caradori—one of those first-class singers of the second class, with whom it would be hard to find a fault, save want of fire.—Elegance of person —purity of voice—a method beyond reproach—thorough musical skill — familiarity with many languages, were all combined in herself.—Yet she only really pleased on the stage,—when she sang in such second parts as *Giulietta* to *Romeo*. Her *Zerlina* was correct, but cold—and it seemed, ere long, to be somehow agreed, by the tacit consent

of every one, that her place was not the stage, but the orchestra.—There, in every part of Europe, she subsequently found honourable and profitable occupation for many a year.

As a young singer, from whom much was hoped —not afterwards to be fulfilled—Signor Ivanoff must be commemorated:—with the sweetest voice, as a gentle tenor, that ever sang in Italian or in Muscovite throat.—Nothing could be more delicious as to tone—more neat as to execution:—nothing, assuredly, ever so closely approached an automaton not wound up, as did he, on the stage, by his insignificance of aspect, and his nullity of demeanour. —In England, he was never seen to attempt to act.—Subsequently, he essayed to do so in Italy, I have heard:—but, by that time, the voice had begun to perish.—In 1834 it was so exquisite as, for a period, to make its owner's utter spiritlessness forgotten.—No such good *Rodrigo* in "Otello" has been heard here since I have known the opera.

Madame degli Antoni was a meritorious lady, with a *mezzo soprano* rather than a *contralto* voice: and that refinement which characterizes amateurs who take to the stage.—Like the generality of these, however, she had gone too far, in singing like an amateur, when transformed, to be forcible enough when grouped with first-class artists—and by an available power and readiness like theirs, to

gratify her audience.—Hers was only a passing apparition.

The German company was beneath mediocrity. What has been said about the narrow limits of their repertory was signally proved in 1834. Though Winter's Opera was, during some thirty years, a universal favourite in Germany, north and south, it seemed to us, in this country, merely a diluted piece of weary writing, in the style of Mozart —in no wise comparable to the composer's "Ratto di Proserpina," written professedly for the Italian stage, in which there is some pleasing and tuneable music.

The other opera new to our foreign stage was a version of "La Dame Blanche," of Boieldieu—in which work, again, Germany has always taken infinite delight—England, not much.—The French composer tried hard to Scotticize himself—by using a northern melody in his overture, "*The Bush aboon Traquair*,"—and to lay out his composition on such an ample scale, as befits a story of sentimental romance, with a touch of the supernatural in it—but never succeeded in ridding himself of French slightness, and in assuming Italian sweetness, or German solidity.—I have always found the music faded as well as feeble:—especially when laboured through (not played with) by the average race of German singers.—This was the humour of our

public generally, as regarded "La Dame Blanche."

The one other novelty of the season was Signor Costa's ballet of "Le Sire Huon,"—which contained much good, though perhaps not enough fanciful music.—A shawl dance by Mdlles. Taglioni and Duvernay (the latter lady then full of beauty and promise) was charmingly graceful and effective.

OPERA GOERS IN 1834.

FROM the year 1834 till the present one, I am able to speak of foreign opera in England with more minute recollection: having since that period not, so far as I am aware, missed one new work, or one first appearance, which has taken place in London—nor one of the changes which have passed over that world within a quarter of a century.—How little is there already left of those who made, and those who listened to the music of the year!

How is everything changed! The seasons were then much more protracted than they have since become: and began as early as February with inferior singers, who disappeared at Easter, when their betters took their places. In this respect the alteration has been for good, which has abolished the idea of bad performances as sufferable:—not so, perhaps, the increased number of opera nights in the week.—This may be in part a necessary consequence of the num-

bers of strangers who come and go through London, and snatch their entertainments as they pass. The non-subscribers are now of as much consequence to the treasury as the habitual frequenters of the theatre; but the strain on the musicians is sadly increased, and with it the difficulty of finding time for such nice preparation of the works performed as, happily, has become a necessity.—By this, too, a certain air of private society, where known persons are sure to be found in known places, which used to distinguish the Opera, has all but departed from it.

Let me number a few of the familiar figures and faces which, from 1834 to 1838, were pointed out to "the friend from the country" as so many belongings of the Italian Opera.—There was no escaping from the entrance of Lindley and Dragonetti into the orchestra: a pair of favourite figures, whose sociable companionship for some thirty years was as remarkable as their appearance was contrasted—no two faces imaginable being more unlike than the round, good-humoured, comely visage of the Yorkshireman from that of the gaunt Venetian—as brown and as tough as one of his own strings.—On what the affectionate regard maintained between them was fed, it is hard to say; for both were next to unintelligible in their speech—the Englishman from an impedi-

ment in utterance; the Italian from the disarranged mixture of many languages in which he expressed his sentiments and narrated his adventures. They talked to each other on the violoncello and double-bass; bending their heads with quiet confidential smiles, which were truly humorous to see. Nothing has been since heard to compare with the intimacy of their mutual musical sympathy—nor is a pair of figures so truly characteristic now to be seen in any orchestra.—Those two are among the sights of London that have vanished for ever.

There were then conspicuous figures in the boxes, in their places as regularly as the opera-nights came round. Among these were a couple of Royal Dukes, one of whom was resolute to be heard as well as seen, and whose criticisms on things as they passed in society or on the stage sometimes broke most comically into the midst of pause or cadence—without intention on his part, since a better natured and more considerate man never breathed.—Then, on Saturday nights, *The* Duke was rarely absent: and the sight of his eagle profile advancing from behind the red curtains of his box was sure to be accompanied by a motion of eager heads and eager whispers in the pit.

Opposite the Royal box was to be seen another celebrity—much observed—as much misunder-

stood: one concerning whom rumour ran more mercilessly riot than concerning most notorious and beautiful women recollected.—There was nothing which people would not say and believe of Lady Blessington. Her queenly and sweet beauty (animated, withal, whenever she spoke, and set off by her peculiar dress) was of itself sufficient to attract remark—and disfavour.—Her wit, too, which her books in no respect represent, was still less pardonable. It enchanted the men; it repaid the women for their slighting curiosity. Her own friends knew her by something better than either her beauty or wit—by a generosity and kindliness of heart, by a constancy in gratitude, rare indeed in one so spoiled by fortune and misfortune as she had been.—I have never known anyone so earnest in defence of the absent and unpopular as herself —never one placed in a position so peculiar, so utterly devoid of caprice or time-serving. Her society included distinguished men of all ranks and all classes,—statesmen, ambassadors, foreign grandees,—an exiled prince since become an Emperor —actors, musicians, painters, poets, historians, men of science, of renown,—and the man of letters as yet without a name, to whom she opened her circle.—For all she had the same attentive natural courtesy. There was no chief guest, no ebb and flow in the warmth of her welcome: whether she was

alone, and glad of a single listener, or surrounded by the most brilliant talkers and the deepest thinkers of the time. Had those whom she befriended with a zeal that knew no limit or prudence, repaid her untiring affection and munificence with only common gratitude—with only a small share of consideration in their claims on her influence, her time, her money—her life would have been far happier and longer.—As it was, there is no remembering her without regret and pain: as a woman to whom hard measure was dealt, and who had to atone for all that seemed gay in her life and brilliant in her social position, by hours of suffering, and disappointment, and hope deferred, little dreamed of during many a year, at least by those who looked up from the pit of the Opera, and saw her there in all the state and bravery of her diamonds—or in the simple gauze cap, fitting close to her beautiful head, the sight of which made the outer world insist that she was going to turn Quaker.

There, too, was Count d'Orsay to be seen, who had for many years been a member of her husband's family.—It is needless to describe "the King of the French" (as the hunting farmers in the Vale of Aylesbury used to call him), as one endowed with rare personal beauty, with talents by the thousand never ripened—with luxurious

and original fancies, enough to turn the heads of a good third of the gay noble youths of London; —needless to put on record that he had a readiness and richness of wit, uniting the best qualities of English humour and French *esprit*, and a buoyancy of spirit which no embarrassment could put down, or reduce into the common laws of prudence.—That he was extravagant to recklessness, and beyond any fortune he possessed, is no secret. —That he was the unprincipled adventurer, which many fancied him when he was living, and in which character some have described him since his death, is most false.—He had been set wrong in his very childhood—by the doting vanity of those who had pampered and indulged a boy so vivacious, so fascinating, so rarely endowed, to an excess little short of insanity. He was bred to think of enjoyment as not merely the business of everyone's life;—but to order his own, as if he had an extra right to it. And in this he was cheered on by every creature who approached him. His gaiety, his fancy, his affectionate nature, his instant wit, were irresistible. The rich and the great, the dull who wanted ideas, the bright who delighted in repartee for repartee, all agreed (it was next to impossible to help it) to minister to him. He was encouraged, he was assisted to realize every whim as it rose, at no matter what cost—to organize all manner of

pleasures, and to invent new forms for them, by way of varying the monotonous costliness of fashionable routine.—There was no one at his ear to tell him what the certain end of all this must be: or if there was, the voice was drowned, and the warning was deprived of its authority by some outburst of high spirits in which it was drowned. It seemed impossible to him to be melancholy or to take thought.—Then he had the sanguine temper of a projector in perfection. He was always going to increase his fortune tenfold;—long after the fortune was only a heap of debts—always on the point of finding some sure extrication from the labyrinth, the intricacy of which, I truly believe, he never knew.—In short, he was a man of genius, fatally, irremediably spoiled on the very threshold of boyhood; but—so far as such a man could be—a man of honour—and further than many a man of unimpeachable probity has been—a man of kind thoughts, generous impulses, and deep affections. —It was impossible for any one who approached him nearly, to forbear becoming attached to him. —It would be impossible to count up one tithe of the unprompted and delicate acts of beneficence and kindness, demanding memory and time, and performed in secresy, by which a life, which the outer world deemed to be merely one of reckless licence and folly, was varied.—I speak of what I

know:—having for many long years seen as much of this dazzling meteoric career as any bystander could see—whose objects and purposes in life ran in a different path, and were pursued in a different fashion.—I can speak of hundreds of good offices, small and great, done to those who had nothing to give in return—of shrewd counsel offered in difficult cases—of a ready practical sense, that could pierce to the heart of a dilemma. There are many living beside myself who have cause to regard the memory of this ill-starred victim to indulgence with such gratitude as belongs to a real friend, who helped them with his best will, and who harmed them never.

As for wit!—I have heard more in that opera-box in one hour than I have heard during months of latter times. Then, moreover, there was no want of wit "in the town" with which to compare it;—I do not mean the mechanical pleasantry of such diners out, men like Theodore Hook and James Smith, who were never contented except when telling some anecdote, or exhibiting some snip-snap of words—but the real, genial, spontaneous, or intellectual frolics of Sydney Smith and Thomas Hood—not to be ordered like the soup and the ice—which broke out unexpectedly in the abundant gaiety of the moment. Those were so many true brighteners of society—men who enjoyed and

made others enjoy—who, when they had thrown the ball, waited till it should be thrown back to them—in place of monopolizing the eyes and ears and laughter of audiences by any deliberate and exclusive exhibition.—Such wit, of his own original quality, Count D'Orsay commanded, with as much courteous good-nature as instant readiness. I have never heard so brilliant and impulsive a talker more entirely devoid of bitterness.

This could not be said of another Opera-frequenter in those days;—whose polished bald head, pale face with its closed eyes, and drooping figure, were always in the stalls, as though their owner was dutifully exhibiting there some act of worship by his presence, in which mind and sympathy took small part.—I speak of Mr. Rogers, whose connoisseurship of Music was represented by himself to be something super-refined—whereas it was merely slender, and based on a few traditions and pleasures of memory.—He had elegant tastes, no doubt—a certain balance in his imaginative faculties, derived from much experience of life and travel on easy terms: he was consulted as an authority on poetry, painting, architecture, and music:—but it is difficult to remember a saying of his, on any of these subjects, save by some covert sarcasm, or open depreciation.—His tongue was as mercilessly cruel as his hand was generous.

The private munificence and courtesy with which he ministered to many a poor artist, who could never trumpet abroad the relief, were not more abundant than the antipathy with which he persecuted all whom he declined to admit into the select sanctuary of his grace.—If Signor Rossini was the question—he raised his eyebrows (where eyebrows were not) and spoke of Paisiello.—When Madlle. Grisi came out, and on her coming naturally excited cordial hopes, which have not been unfulfilled—he would wander far a-field—and murmur something about Mdlle. Grisi's aunt, "La Grassini," or about Banti.—How such an elaborate advocate of the "good old times" could so diligently bend himself to keeping pace with despised modern pleasures, as Rogers did,—was, as an inconsistency, remarkable, if it did not imply some resolution of acting a part till the last.—I have never seen a man so devoted to public amusements who, on principle, appeared to enjoy them so little as he.—He used to sleep at the Opera, and at the Exeter Hall Oratorios, which he religiously frequented.—But the evening service gone through furnished remarks for his breakfast table.

Another constant frequenter of the opera of a different class is not to be forgotten, if only because the print of his visits there is to be found on these pages — the graceful, original, coquettish artist,

Alfred Chalon—who during some twenty bright years was the fashionable painter of English fashionable female beauty;—in whose hands the most outrageous modes assumed a certain pictorial air, and the plainest face was beautified with a look of high-breeding or intelligence, without losing its likeness.—Latterly both his eye and his hand in some measure betrayed him. He became careless and exaggerated as an artist; but his best works will remain and be sought for as illustrations of Beauty, Fashion, and the Theatre, in the reigns of William the Fourth, and the earlier years of our present Sovereign's sovereignty. Never was there a more quaint, more original man than Chalon,—never one whose appearance was less like that of a beauty-painter.—He was large-featured, ill put together, and ungainly.—When he spoke there was a little lisp and a play of countenance—seeming to say, "*I could be sarcastic if I would,*" which contradicted the first impression. He had no conversation, but vented little odd remarks and civilities—which seemed strangely unfitted to so large-boned a man. He played on the flageolet;—he had a girl's fondness for confectionary.—Yet he was shrewd, observant—had grand thoughts as an artist; and those true, intense family affections manifested without grimace, which, whenever and wherever they are seen, atone for a thousand fopperies and

foibles, and dispose us to respect and to think kindly of their owner. There are sketches by him extant—mere first thoughts improvised—of a vigour and boldness totally amazing, as coming from one whose world was that of breast-knots, and bouquets, and curls, and bracelets, and stage-passion rouged for the foot-lights. One which I recollect—"The Rising of the Dead at the Crucifixion,"—recurs to me now as a wild, awful dream painted on paper, which, if signed by some august name, might provoke pages of transcendental ecstacies.—Among his caricatures—and they were many—some had a vigorous, sarcastic truth, which hit directly home.—No one could be more amiable or simple in his domestic life than Chalon. He kept house with an unmarried brother (an artist less in vogue than himself), and with an unmarried sister—large and masculine to look upon, who affected—as do many women over whom painters have influence—a singular flaring style of dress.—The close, affectionate, real good understanding of these three,—their utter want of advertence to any possible singularity in themselves,—was a thing capital to see in a great city like ours—especially as maintained among those whom circumstance and inevitable temptation might have separated, without totally disuniting them.

The three lived long and lovingly together—the sister dying first;—her death darkening the house

and the life of the two survivors, past hope of much future brightness. Then the Chalon, to whom this book is indebted, had to wait on the slow decay of his brother, ere he himself disappeared, to be no more seen.

The above recollections are so strongly associated with my impressions of the Haymarket Theatre, that they are perhaps not out of place here—though, if considered as a "curtain tune," they may be found something of the longest.

THE YEAR 1835.

OPERAS.

"La Sonnambula," "I Puritani."*—*Bellini.* "Anna Bolena," "Marino Faliero."*—*Donizetti.* "La Prova d'un Opera Seria."—*Gnecco.* "Tancredi," "La Gazza Ladra," "Semiramide," "Otello," "Il Barbiére," "L'Assedio di Corinto."—*Rossini.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Finklohr.* E. Seguin. Grisi. Brambilla.—MM. Rubini. Ivanoff. Taglioni. Lablache. F. Lablache.

BALLETS.

Nina. Paul et Virginie.* Zephir Berger.* La Chasse des Nymphes.* Mazila.* La Somnambule.

Principal Dancers.

Mde. Taglioni.—M. Perrot.

THE YEAR 1835.

In the year 1835—the return of Lablache to Paris and London, completed that quartett of accomplished singers and artists, which for many following years was to present performances unprecedented in their evenness and finished concord.—The admirable union thus made up was improved to its utmost by the Parisian managers—always more courageous in catering for novelty than our London ones have been.—It was by them that Donizetti's "Marino Faliero," and Bellini's "I Puritani" were commissioned from their composers—Signor Rossini having retired into the obstinate silence which no temptation could induce him to break.

The production of these two new operas, then, in London, was the event of the season. On such occasions there is always a success and a failure.—The public will not endure two favourites. In

spite of the grandeur of Lablache as the *Doge of Venice*,—in spite of the beauty of the duett of the two basses in the first act of "Marino,"—in spite of the second act containing a beautiful moonlight scene with a *barcarolle*, sung to perfection by Ivanoff, and one of Rubini's most incomparable and superb vocal displays,—"Marino Faliero" languished—in part from the want of interest in the female character—a fault fatal to an opera's popularity.—On the other hand, from first to last note, "I Puritani" was found enchanting. The picture of Grisi, leaning against Lablache to listen, in the second scene—the honeyed elegance of Rubini's song of entrance—the bridal *polacca* in the first act—in the second, the mad scene, and the duett between the two basses (a feebler repetition of effects already produced in "Norma,")—entranced "the town."—In the third act, Rubini, who had not appeared since an early stage of the story, carried every one to the seventh heaven by a display of his powers of expression—potent enough to make the severest for a while forget the platitude of the materials with which they had to deal.

London was *steeped* in the music of "I Puritani;' —organs ground it,—adventurous amateurs dared it,—the singers themselves sang it to such satiety as to lose all consciousness of what they were engaged in, and, when once launched, to go on

mechanically.—I must have heard Mdlle. Grisi's *Polacca* that year alone,—if once, one hundred times—to speak without exaggeration.—In short, Bellini had "the luck." Donizetti's turn of triumph was to come later,—and, to my judgment, in a work very inferior to his "Marino Faliero." This, then, is the year for attempting some character of the composer who displaced for a while Signor Rossini,—seeing that it was the year of his last opera.

There was no novelty among the singers worth naming, since Mdlle. Brambilla had appeared some years earlier, together with Mdme. Pasta.—In those days she had been a handsome girl, with magnificent dark eyes—a rich, though limited, *contralto* voice, and no very great vocal skill. When she came back she was a mature woman, with her beauty overblown, and her voice impaired to the last point of feebleness and fatigue. There were hardly two tones one alike to the other left in her register.—In some passages they were nothing more than hoarse whispers, almost devoid of musical sound or association.—But, in the interim betwixt the young bloom and the premature fading of physical gifts, Mdlle. Brambilla had learned how to sing; and, whether from her own taste or from obedience to the *maestro* who prepared her exhibitions, her choice and variety in ornament

carried her through the season to the satisfaction of her public.—Madame Finklohr, a *soprano*, made no impression whatsoever;—I subsequently heard her in *La Scala*, at Milan, where, again, she was only tolerated, though the days of Italian dearth had already set in.

BELLINI'S OPERAS.

CHARACTERISTICS.

THOUGH Vincenzo Bellini—born at Catania, in 1802—was ostensibly educated at Naples, under Tritto and Zingarelli, and commenced his career by composing little pieces for instruments—fifteen overtures and symphonies, (say biographers,) three masses, and other church music,—his less boyish works make it clear that the acquirements with which he began to write must have been of the slenderest possible quality and quantity—a little exceeding those of any amateur* who can combine a few chords, originate simple tunes, and

* This was curiously proved during many seasons subsequent to 1834, at every performance of "Norma" in London. The overture then played was not Bellini's prelude; but the composition of an English amateur, Mr. C. Raper—so thoroughly tinctured with the Italian spirit, that its parentage passed unquestioned and unsuspected.

show some feeling for the grouping of voices and instruments. Nor is there in music an example more signally showing than Bellini's, on what a narrow base such decided individuality as distinguishes inventor from copyist can rest. More trite and faded themes and phrases than many of his (among them some the best-loved by the singers), can hardly be imagined. Few, however, are without some rescuing touch, which gives life and colour to the combinations of notes habitually sickly;—for there is nothing more fatiguing and mawkish, even in Spohr's incessant chromatics, than Bellini's abuse of *appogiatura*.—In the well-known duett, "*Mira o Norma*," from his best tragic opera, this amounts to a yawn: which is distasteful.—Yet, as counterbalance, Bellini wrote so as to draw out and display the expressive power of the singer, enabling him by its aid to illustrate the situation—feebly though that be sketched in his music. It would be difficult to imagine anything essentially weaker than the melody of the favourite song from "Il Pirata," by which Rubini brought the new composer into notice,*—but who felt its feebleness when Rubini

* The list of Bellini's known operas is as under :—"Adelina e Salvina," (1824); "Bianca e Gernando," (1826); "Il Pirata," (1827)—given with great success at Milan; "La Straniera," (1828)—one of Mdme. Meric Lalande's triumphs in the same opera-capital; "I Capuleti" (*Romeo and Juliet*); "La Sonnambula" and "Norma," (written for

filled every tone of it with the spirit of the scene? The same criticism, in a less degree, applies to the favourite tenor air in "La Sonnambula"—another of the great Tenor's triumphs. A third example in the last scene of "I Puritani" is noticeable, because its theme is identically that of Simon Mayer's "*Donne l'Amore*," fitted with English verse by Haynes Bayly,—as, "O! 'tis the melody."—Mayer's original tune was written to slight words;—Bellini's repetition or plagiarism fitted it to the life-and-death suspense of a lover doomed to execution, on being forced from the idol of his heart,—whom misadventure has driven mad,—and whom he quits to mount the scaffold, leaving her in a swoon, which (for her sake) he would fain hope is the sleep of death.—Yet Rubini contrived, by the inflexions of his voice, to make this unmarked *cantabile* lacerate with its distress the heart, through the ear.

These are peculiarities worth dwelling on, because on the principle involved in them depends the existence of opera-music.—To insure this, the singer must be permitted play and display. It is idle to say that the composer's thought, irrespective of means to impress it, should dominate,—idle to appeal to Drama, and to ask, whether a Shakespeare

Mdme. Pasta); "Beatrice di Tenda;" lastly, "I Puritani,"—composed for Paris, in 1834.

or a Siddons is the stronger in "Macbeth;" and for this reason. The admitted conventionalities of Drama are doubled by the conditions of Opera.—The tale must be carried on, not in verse, but in rhythmical music, solitary or combined—must be wrought out on the stage,—not merely with footlights before it, but with an orchestra betwixt these and the audience. But that the singer of an opera-tale ought to predominate in the opera (very well if the tale and its words be good — still the better if the music be good—not the more ill if the instrumental portion be good—none the worse if the scenery be probable, and the theatrical accessories are wrought to any degree of refinement), is a fact no more to be disputed than the platitude that a ball is not a walking-party, or that a chamber-quartett of stringed instruments is not a sonnet by Wordsworth.

That the great German instrumental composers have (since Mozart's period) despised the art of singing, and, on some confused theory of "idea," have tried to subjugate the singer, and to destroy the singer's powers of individual expression, in no respect whatever decides the value of Italian Opera, or of German instrumental science and fantasy. It would be as hard for the best woodman to determine which was the lovelier among trees — the chestnut, when flowering in spring, with its

pyramidal spires of bloom; or the slow-growing evergreen, harsh-cornered cedar, pushing its iron elbows right and left all the year round with the same pertinacity.

Only by reference to some sympathies, such as those here shadowed out, can the merit of Bellini, and the reason for his popularity, be judged aright. It is true that the final *rondo* in "La Sonnambula," that certain passages in "Norma" (for instance, *Oroveso's* battle-chant in the opening scene, and *Norma's* outbreak of rage in the *trio* to the first act), prove that he *could* be distinct and forcible; and, by his force, bind his singers, as well as be obliged to them, in his gentleness. The same character is applicable to his mad scene in the second act of "I Puritani." In this, the *largo*, "*Qui la voce*," is more wayward, woeful, and afflicting, by intense misery, than any similar mad-song in recollection — the painful recitatives in Purcell's "Delirious Lady" not forgotten.

Then, that Bellini could be originally gay, the *polacca* in "I Puritani" remains to prove. He might, if life had been spared to him, have arrived at a greater versatility than his early efforts promised. But it may be insisted that, in point of science, from first to last, Bellini was little more than an amateur, promising an artist. His power of construction was a mere nothing. His modulations

might be pronounced awkward and hampered, had not we lived to see crudities cruder than his set forth, in the case of young German writers, as discoveries belonging to an era of emancipation. His treatment of the orchestra was violently noisy, or else uselessly feeble. The warbling flute of the prelude to "*Casta Diva*," *Norma's* favourite song, could not well be poorer, nor further apart from any idea of such support to the vocal prayer of the Druid Priestess to her Goddess, as the hearer naturally expects in our days, when an orchestra has ripened; and when orchestral writing should bear up—not supersede—the situation, the voice, and the singer.

But Bellini was picturesque;—and this few modern Italians are. They have some feeling for passion; they have less for humours; they have none for the aspects of Nature—for the solemnities of night—for the wakings at the dawn. In spite of the inexperience with which the instrumental score is filled up, the opening scene of "Norma," in the dim druidical wood, bears the true character of antique sylvan mystery. There is day-break, again—a fresh tone of *reveillée*—in the prelude to "I Puritani." If Bellini's genius was not versatile in its means of expression—if it had not gathered all the appliances by which science fertilizes nature—it, beyond doubt, included appreciation of truth

—no less than instinct for beauty. And for this, I fancy, he will be long set apart from the superficial and ephemeral manufacturers who have done so much to bring the name of Italian Opera into discredit. His death, in 1836, may have prevented his developing resources, of the existence of which, when he started in his race for fame, he did not entertain the remotest idea.*

* The above character of Bellini has received an interesting illustration in the letter from himself to his publisher at Milan, respecting his last opera, "I Puritani," and future works, which has been just published (September, 1861).—The composer writes of himself and of his prospects with a modesty of claim, on the part of a man who had already the ear of Europe, strange indeed,—but as welcome as it is rare, in these our grasping times, when the singer who makes popular a song expects to receive a larger sum than was paid for an opera-score in days when composers *were*.—More remarkable still, to those who are familiar with the haste of Southern genius, is Bellini's tone in regard to his power of writing. He did not care to be paid exorbitantly;—he did not care to produce hastily.—But he sought that which was real—that to which he could do the best justice;—and he sought to enrich his alphabet of expression—eagerly in proportion as he was successful;—and, by his success, he may have tested his want of much sound and real knowledge.—In brief, he had within him, the material of which a real artist is made.

THE YEAR 1836.

OPERAS.

"La Straniera," "Beatrice di Tenda,"* "Norma," "I Puritani."—*Bellini.* "Anna Bolena."—*Donizetti.* "La Prova d'un Opera Seria."—*Gnecco.* "I Briganti."*—*Mercadante.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "La Gazza Ladra," "Il Barbiére," "Otello," "L'Assedio di Corinto."—*Rossini.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Grisi. Colleoni-Corti.* Assandri.*—MM. Rubini. Winter. Cartagenova.* Tamburini. Lablache. F. Lablache. Galli.

BALLETS.

"Le Rossignol."*—"Beniowsky."*

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Saint-Romain.* Carlotta Grisi.*—M. Perrot.

THE YEAR 1836.

THERE was no novelty this year of much importance, either among the works performed or those who performed them. "Beatrice di Tenda" is one of Bellini's feeble operas, which will never sustain itself in this country. "Norma" set itself in its place, once for all. Madame Pasta's *Adalgisa* (for such had been Mademoiselle Grisi) had not drawn so near that wondrous actress without having imbibed some of her deep and true dramatic spirit. She was then, too, in all the splendour of her beauty of voice and person, and mounted the throne of her predecessor with so firm a step, that the world of the moment might be well beguiled into doubting which of the two was the greater Queen.

Mademoiselle Assandri, by whom she was seconded, was promising, graceful, and fresh, as a "second woman," in no common degree. The duetts of the two (and in "Norma" the duetts

are as important as in "Semiramide") were delicious, in the charm which they exercised, not merely over ear, but over eye also. Mademoiselle Assandri, however, was merely a passing artist. Her engaging promise was borne out by no after fulfilment. She disappeared early from the stage, without reason given. Still, as *Adalgisa*, there was something about her tender, in tone of voice, in look, and in feeling, such as no study can produce—which suited the character admirably. She sang carefully and with expression, and vanished too soon.

"I Briganti," by Signor Mercadante, commissioned for Paris—as an opera by Bellini, and as another by Donizetti, before it had been commissioned—failed to please here; in this following the fate of all its clever composer's operas on our side of the Alps. The music was well made. Rubini had a beautiful *cantabile* in the second act: but the transformed version of Schiller's "Robbers" proved merely a "*Trans*formed *De*formed."—Great as Lablache was, he could not present the famine-starved old man in the tower. Popular as Mademoiselle Grisi was, she could not force on public acceptance the calculated *solfeggi*, which, in her part, were laid out to do duty for airs and graces. In short, there was a mediocre respectability in the music not to be endured: and accordingly the opera died—without any one lamenting its

death. That its composer has written single songs which last—such as the *contralto* airs from "Nitocri" and "Il Giuramento"—such as the tenor melody from "I due Illustri Rivali," in which Signor Mario has been so fascinating—does not prevent his being found, when met in the larger field of entire dramas, tiresome, characterless—not to be blamed—not to be admired; an industrious man of talent, in short, but no genius.

The disastrous appearance of Madame Colleoni-Corti calls for no remembrance beyond that of the epithet. Signor Cartagenova deserved more praise than he found in England, as an artist of some vigour and originality, if not a great singer—one to whose counsels other artists have expressed themselves as much indebted. On the whole, however, this was a barren season for Opera.

"Beniowsky," a dashing and elaborate Russian *ballet*, was thoroughly successful. The music, by Bochsa, was brilliant, if not new; the scenic glories of it were, in those days, something extraordinary. There was a national dance, "Krakoviak," by Mademoiselle Saint-Romain, which was popular and piquant. In the *ballet*, too, appeared Mademoiselle Carlotta Grisi, who was then gracious and promising;—with a young face, a complexion like that of the briar-rose, a shy, sparkling pair of

eyes, and a certain modest grace, accompanied with fearless and firm execution.

But the golden age of *ballet* was beginning to wane—or (to put it otherwise) no new-comers could as yet succeed to the thrones of Mademoiselle Taglioni and Mademoiselle Fanny Elssler. Many, since they danced, have been applauded, and have gathered laurels and bouquets. No one has originated anything since their day—no one, therefore—as they did—has marked a period.

MADAME GRISI.

A QUARTER of a century is a fair length of reign for any Queen — a brilliant one for an Opera Queen of these modern times, when "wear and tear" are so infinitely greater than they used to be.—The supremacy of Madame Grisi has been secured and prolonged by a combination of qualities rare at any period. In our day there has been no woman so beautiful, so liberally endowed with voice and with dramatic impulse, as herself—Catalani excepted. In many respects, Madame Grisi has been more satisfactory than her gorgeous predecessor—more valuable to her public, because less exacting. By choice or by chance, Catalani preferred to be associated with and to be surrounded by pigmies — to wander Europe hither and thither without a fixed theatrical settlement—a habit totally destructive of the fortunes of the authors who would invent, and can nowhere find material

to be relied on for execution. Madame Grisi has always formed one of the most equally-distinguished Opera companies ever collected. She had, during fifteen years, two homes—one in London, one in Paris—where she was certainly to be found at certain seasons; and, by such constancy in arranging her career, kept alive (in England especially) the loyalty of her subjects, to a degree which is rare, but which was as largely well-merited. This manner of arranging her life precluded usurpation. It seems already a long time since favourite singers on the other side of the Alps—who have long perished and passed away—spoke of the favourite *prima donna* of London and of Paris as one of "the Old Guard," with ill-concealed envy. Madame Grisi was in 1860 a favourite still;—with only the remnant of her powers more attractive and commanding than her successors who one after another have ventured hither with ambitious projects, and have departed abusing English obstinacy, because they were unable to wrest the sceptre out of her hands.

That this is matter of history there is no gainsaying. With the many, no Opera Queen has prolonged her reign so successfully as she. The "few" have admitted it, without reluctance, though they may have never held her to be the absolute divinity of Opera. I find no part of my task harder than the

endeavour fairly to estimate the qualities of this remarkable artist, and to ascertain the height of the pedestal (so to say) on which she should be exalted in the gallery of first-class Italian singers of the nineteenth century.

The remarkable beauty—which Time informed with expression, and ripened into the semblance of majesty—of the girl who ran on the stage to sing Signor Rossini's "*Di piacer*," on a raw March evening in 1834, at once secured her a cordial welcome. That which her figure and her gestures then wanted in grace, was already supplied by symmetry of feature, by a rich southern smoothness of complexion, by an "air of the head" which enchanted without any petty over-consciousness of their owner.—Never has so beautiful a woman as Madame Grisi been so little coquettish on the stage. I remember no solitary instance of smile or sign which could betray to the closest observer that she was attempting any of those artifices, which are so unpleasing to all who love art, and who do not regard the theatre as a slave-market.

Though, naturally enough, in some respects inexperienced on her first appearance in England, Giulia Grisi was not incomplete. And what a *soprano* voice was hers!—rich, sweet—equal throughout its compass of two octaves (from C to C) without a break, or a note which had to be managed.

The voice subdued the audience on her first appearance ere "*Di piacer*" was done. In 1834 she commanded an exactness of execution not always kept up by her during the after years of her reign. Her shake was clear and rapid; her scales were certain; every interval was taken without hesitation by her. Nor has any woman ever more thoroughly commanded every gradation of force than she—in those early days especially;—not using the contrast of loud and soft too violently, but capable of any required violence, of any advisable delicacy. In the singing of certain slow movements *pianissimo*—such as the girl's prayer on the road to execution in "La Gazza," or as the *cantabile* in the last scene of "Anna Bolena" (which we know as "Home, sweet home")—the clear, penetrating beauty of her reduced tones (different in quality from the whispering semi-ventriloquism which was one of Mademoiselle Lind's most favourite effects) was so unique, as to reconcile the ear to a certain shallowness of expression in her rendering of the words and the situation.

At that time, the beauty of sound was more remarkable (in such passages as I have just spoken of) than the depth of feeling. When the passion of the actress was roused—as in "La Gazza," during the scenes with her deserter father,—with the villainous magistrate—or in the prison with her lover—or on

her trial, before sentence was passed—her glorious notes, produced without difficulty or stint, rang through the house like a clarion, and were truer in their vehemence to the emotion of the scene, than were those wonderfully subdued sounds, in the penetrating tenuity of which there might be more or less artifice.—From the first, the vigour always went more closely home to the heart than the tenderness, in her singing, and her acting, and her vocal delivery—though the beauty of face and voice—the mouth that never distorted itself—the sounds that never wavered—might well mislead the generality of her auditors, and were to be resisted by none.

As an artist calculated to engage and retain the average public, without trick or affectation, and to satisfy, by her balance of charming attributes—by the assurance, moreover, that she was giving the best she knew how to give—she satisfied even those who had received much greater pleasure, and had been impressed with much deeper emotion, in the performances of others. I have never tired of Madame Grisi, during five-and-twenty years:—but I have never been, in her case, under one of those spells of intense enjoyment and sensation which make an epoch in life, and which leave a print on memory never to be cancelled by any later attraction—never to be forgotten so long as life and power to receive shall endure.

Madame Grisi has been remarkable for her cleverness in adopting the effects and ideas of others more thoughtful and originally inventive than herself. With two exceptions, her most popular personations have followed those of other actresses. Her *Norma*, doubtless her grandest performance, was modelled on that of Madame Pasta—perhaps, in some points, was an improvement on the model; because there was more of animal passion in it; and this (as in the scene of imperious and abrupt rage which closes the first act) could be driven to extremity without its becoming repulsive; owing to the absence of the slightest coarseness in her personal beauty. There was in it the wild ferocity of the tigress, but a certain frantic charm therewith, which carried away the hearer *—nay, which possibly belongs to the true reading of the character of the Druid Priestess, unfaithful to her vows.

* It is impossible to advert to a quarter of a century of "Norma" in England without putting on record, that the only artist able to dispute the part with Madame Grisi, was an English singer—the last of a great dramatic family. But Miss Adelaide Kemble, if in passages more subtle than her Italian contemporary—(perhaps as a matter of temperament and intellect—perhaps as the condition of a voice only to be subjugated by merciless labouring)—virtually wrought out the character in the same one way. There is no stopping, no reserve, possible, in certain moments of emotion. A storm made "sad and civil" (as *Olivia* hath it) amounts to little more than a futile attempt at bad weather.

I think this must be so, from recollecting how signally the attempt of a younger *Norma* to colour the part differently, failed—I allude to Mademoiselle Lind. That singer's *Julia*, in Spontini's "Vestale," was a real, pathetic, admirable piece of acting—by much her best tragic character. But, however successful she was when trying to express the intense delicacy of emotion which characterizes the noble Roman Virgin—in her rendering of the impassioned Pagan Priestess, her failure was something as entire, as aimless, as it is possible for so remarkable an artist to make. The actress and the play had no agreement;—yet in Germany, where critics distort their vision to fathom depths which are merely so many mystified shallows, I have heard this "maidenly" reading of *Norma* by Mademoiselle Lind lauded as among the master-strokes of never-sufficiently-to-be-wondered-at thoughtfulness. So that Madame Grisi's reality kept the stage, and swept Mademoiselle Lind's novelty from it as with a whirlwind of fire.

On a level with her *Norma* was Madame Grisi's *Lucrezia Borgia*—even more original as a conception—ripened and coloured into a superb and glowing picture as years went on. In this opera, however, she had the advantage of being supported as no *Norma* can be. The charm and grace of *Genuaro*, so exquisitely adapted to that

most pictorial of tenors, Signor Mario, by contrast, gave enormous vigour to her sinister and voluptuous beauty; and sharpened the agonies of the secret, in the hideous conflict with her fourth husband, undertaken for the defence of the son she dare not own. More repulsive and abominable some of the situations could not be—belonging to the night-mare days of French Drama—but their power can hardly be exceeded.

Yet Madame Grisi has been surpassed, I have been told, by the original *Lucrezia;* a woman far less splendidly gifted by nature—Madame Ungher—whose serpentine and deep malevolence, subtly veiled at the moment when its most diabolical works were on foot, has been described as fearful. Madame Grisi had less astuteness—more violence. The moment of villainous rage and revenge, when *Lucrezia* is recognized and unmasked in Venice by the young nobles, was magnificent in expression and attitude—a true prophecy of the supper of retribution to which she treated her persecutors at Ferrara. Her appearance, too, in the scene with the jealous Duke, her husband, and the young soldier, was gorgeous;—especially when she first represented the part.—She then wore a black dress richly embroidered with gold, with a crimson scarf round her waist,—which set off her bared arms to their utmost advantage. The passionate haste, too,

with which she administered the counter-poison, was made doubly forcible by the despairing strength she could throw into the notes of the agitated movement—one of Donizetti's best. In the last act, her reception of her guests at the death-banquet might have been more impressive. Something was wanted of the quiet triumph of satisfied vengeance with which Rachel subdued her hearers into horror, in certain scenes of her *Roxana*. The half-repressed concentration of scorn and duplicity —of Crime that broods, and, when the hour comes, satisfies itself deliberately by witnessing the agony of its victims—was not within her reach. With her all, it seemed, must be impulse and rapid movement.

Madame Grisi's attitudes were always more or less harsh, angular, and undignified; and when she was in her prime, and had no reason to manage or spare her resources, there was a fierceness in certain of her outbursts which impaired her effects. In short, her acting did not show reflection, so much as the rich, uncultivated, imperious nature, of a most beautiful and adroit southern woman.

Of her, too, however, as of Lablache, I shall have to speak again and again, as the passing years are noticed—the above being merely an outline. While I am writing, in May, 1861, the vision of all her glory, so long protracted, is rapidly passing from the stage. The hour of her parting with her

subjects has come. It is hardly in the course of possibility, that any such phenomenon as a career like hers in this country will be witnessed by the chronicler—if such should be—who, thirty years hence, would carry on the tale of Foreign Opera in England.

THE YEAR 1837.

OPERAS.

"Il Matrimonio."—*Cimarosa.* "Malek Adhel."*—*Costa.* "Norma," "I Puritani."—*Bellini.* "Anna Bolena," "L'Elisir d'Amore,"* "Belisario."*—*Donizetti.* "Ildegonda."*—*Marliani.* "Medea."—*Mayer.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "La Donna del Lago," "La Cenerentola," "Semiramide," "Pietro l'Eremita."—*Rossini.* "Romeo e Giulietta."—*Zingarelli.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Blasis. Giannoni.* Albertazzi.* Assandri. Grisi. Pasta.—MM. Catone.* Deval.* Bellini.* Curioni. Inchiadi.* Ivanoff. Rubini. Tamburini. Lablache. F. Lablache.

BALLETS.

"Fra Diavolo."*—"Le Corsaire."*

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Duvernay. Herminie Elssler.* Montessu.

THE YEAR 1837.

DURING the winter of 1836-7, an attempt had been made at the Lyceum Theatre to establish a Comic Opera. To this we owed the introduction in this country of Donizetti's "LElisir;"—an effort to make England like Signor Ricci's "Scaramuccia," and Signor Coppola's "Nina Pazza,"—also the revival, after twenty years, of Mozart's "Le Nozze." The speculation, though resumed in the early winter of 1837-8, was understood not to have been successful. The new Italian compositions were not relished.

Nor was this disregard unjust. The prettiness of Signor Ricci's comic music could not conceal its writer's want of style and science. The story he set is puerile—in the worn-out Italian taste; and, so far as I know, his name has already died away in Italy, except in those third-rate theatres, to listen to

music in which gives a shock to every sense; where the singers are bad, the buffoonery is violent, and the audiences (to be lenient) want washing. The only one time when I was ever seduced into sleep at a theatre, was over an Opera of Ricci's at Florence:—and not because the Opera was poor; but because the vocalists were execrable, and the atmosphere of garlic and from crowding humanity amounted to a smell strong enough, as the Irishman said, "to hang one's hat on."

Signor Coppola's "Nina" stood a still poorer chance with us. Though, for a while, it displaced the better "Ninas" of Paisiello and Dalayrac, and was even translated for the *Opera Comique* of Paris—there to bring out Madame Eugenie Garcia—even the simple prettiness of the story, and the scope afforded the actress, could not save music so utterly stale.

These smaller Lyceum Operas, however, gave the greater theatre, what for the first time during many seasons it had not enjoyed—a passable company before Easter. Signor Catone, their tenor, was young, well-looking, with an agreeable voice, heavy and half-trained; but the half-training made the whole difference betwixt his success and that of any first-rate singer.

An odd thing (not to be forgotten in a record of foreign Opera in England) was the appearance of

M. Deval, a tenor, of whom no one had ever heard, here or elsewhere, save in Liverpool. Some "undertaker," with the best intentions, had, even then, wished to give that rich provincial town an Opera of its own, manned and womaned by singers of whom none had ever heard—and from Liverpool, and from people there, who should have known better, had arrived such praise of M. Deval, that one could hardly believe him to be a

"Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood,"

till one had heard him. His voice was dry, tiresome, and yawning; but he commanded to the utmost a show of imposition on his public, by singing slowly, and by assuming some of the airs of a singer.

This was the year when Madame Albertazzi appeared; but as the Englishwomen who have sung on London's foreign Opera-stage will be spoken of as belonging to a group of traditions and memories, her appearance is merely noted.

The season of 1837 was musically interesting, though it put the splendid genius of Signor Rossini still further into retreat, by the bringing out of many who aspired to succeed him.—Donizetti's "Belisario" was a failure.—His "L'Elisir" has never won a profitable stage success in England—a work infinitely poorer than "Le Philtre," by M. Auber, the book of which (French again!) Doni-

zetti laid hold of.—The music has been in concert-rooms hackneyed to a death, after which its hard to fancy any possible resurrection.

Signor Costa's "Malek Adhel" is to be viewed in a light altogether different; not as a chance work flung out by a fluent writer, but as the deliberate essay of a musician—strong and quick in one capacity—to change his ground of action. Whether a great conductor can ever be a great composer, is a doubtful matter. No modern example of the kind exists—save, perhaps, in the case of Mendelssohn;—and he was lively, rather than certain, as a conductor. When at the head of his own Leipsic band, no one could be more successful than he: elsewhere, he was fretted by want of understanding and sympathy among his forces—and fretted them, accordingly. In England he obtained no great result as a conductor, save in his own compositions. In those, the effect of his presence and presidence was magnetic.

From the first evening when Signor Costa took up the *baton*,—a young man, from a country then despised by every musical pedant—a youth who came to England without flourish, announcement, or protection, as a singer without much voice, to do what was never done in England before—it was to be felt that in him were combined the materials of a great Conductor;—nerve to enforce discipline,

readiness to the second, and that certain influence which only a vigorous man could exercise over the disconnected folk who made up an orchestra in those days.—Times are changed since then. Good taste, good feeling, good manners, are now the rule (rather than the exception) in the world of subordinate music; but they were not so thirty years since. The stranger had to work, and to work his way up, with the coarsest of materials.

Such occupation is hardly to be braved and conquered by the strongest of mortals, without some loss of fancy. Then, there is little or no possibility of writing well for the stage (unless the man be called Beethoven) without writing fluently and frequently. Signor Costa's "Malek Adhel," however, is a thoroughly conscientious work, containing an amount of melody with which he has never been duly credited. In the first act, there are a delicious tenor song, for Rubini, and an elegant romance for the *contralto*, which pleased in spite of the lifelessness of Madame Albertazzi;—in the second, a *terzetto* to the one* forcible situation of the Opera;—in the

* I cannot resist dwelling on this concerted piece, for the sake of recording a wondrous piece of inconsistency, to be noticed in our righteous English public. The situation is that of a Christian woman, who, to save herself from love which she hardly knows how to resist, takes refuge by clinging to a Cross—(a situation, by-the-way, analogous to that of *Alice* against *Bertram*, in M. Meyerbeer's "Robert.") The same combination and crisis occurs in Sir E. Lytton's

third, a grand *scena* for Madame Grisi, which she sang consummately—and *what* a song for Rubini! No one to come (as I have already said) will be able to touch "*Tiranno cadrai.*" The air, though strained in its passion—demanding an E flat on the treble scale—was wondrously calculated for the singer;—*too* wondrously; since it renders the revival of the Opera (of which it is the culminating point) difficult almost to impossibility.

Of Marliani's "Ildegonda" I recollect nothing, beyond the conclave of the grandest-looking people who could have been assembled at any price (had they never tried to sing) sitting on the stage in old Italian dresses, when the curtain drew up.—Marliani died young, ere he justified his pretensions to compose; having tried his hand twice in Paris—once among the Italians with this "Ildegonda," once, with "La Xacarilla," among the French. But he is worth a word, because of a certain air, "*Stanca di piu combattere*"—which Madame Grisi used to introduce on her entrance in "Otello"—which she never sang well, but which, nevertheless, was a great Italian air of parade.

"La Vallière;" but, whereas in the Drama they were hissed, with due orthodox opprobrium, by our play-goers—in the Opera, they excited the only dramatic success of the night.—The *libretto* of "Malek Adhel," from Madame Cottin's novel, is, everywhere else, poor in suggestion for a composer.

MADAME PASTA.

As an artist who could turn natural deficiencies into rare beauties—who could make us forgive others which cannot be thus transformed by the presence and power of Genius, Truth, and Thought in one—who has printed deeper impressions on the memories of those that heard her than any other female singer—Madame Pasta must be placed first in the first rank of all who have appeared in England during the last thirty years.—Her great triumphs, however, belong to a period somewhat earlier.

My earliest recollection of the Italian Opera in London, is of Signor Rossini's "Zelmira"*—of all

* There is small chance of this opera being ever revived, not merely because of its absurd and wearisome story, but because it demands tenor singers the race of which is extinct—commanding a brilliancy which it has been, of late, the fashion to denounce, as so much musical frippery. But the introduction to the first act,—the air

his serious operas the most gorgeously florid;—in which will be found more than one foretaste of "Semiramide," and, I venture to think, pieces equal in force and originality to its more popular successor.—In England the opera could not establish itself. The story is alike dreary and monstrous, containing, I think, merely one strong situation—an arrested murder, or something of the kind. The men who appeared in "Zelmira"—with the exception of Signor Porto, with a hard, deep, bass voice—were utterly inefficient; but I remember, as if it was a thing of yesterday, the entirely new sensation created in me by the entrance of the heroine, and by the first sounds which issued from her lips. I remember her exquisite delivery of the opening phrases of "*Perche mi guardi*" (a *duettino* which she sang with Mademoiselle Brambilla; then a girl with a dark, speaking face, and a rich, untrained, *contralto* voice);—the thrill of terror

for the deep bass voice, "*Ah gia trascorse*"—the *terzetto* (best known among its musical pieces)—the pompous duett for *soprano* and tenor, with chorus—the *finale* to the first act, very carefully written for Vienna—the delicious *scena*, "*Ciel pietoso*," for *contralto* (not to be tedious,) seven-eighths of the opera, are in Signor Rossini's highest Italian style; and most vexatious is it that, in a time when novelty is becoming as precious as the last leaf of the Sybil's last book, the peculiarities alluded to prevent the possibility of presenting "Zelmira" in its present form.

caused by her gesture and declamation at the one tragic moment of her part;—her singing of a *cavatina* by Bonfichi, "*Ah che forse*," which she introduced in place of the *finale* originally written as a close to the opera;—and her magnificent, queenly smile, as she received the applause of a theatre crowded with a brilliant audience.—For those were the days, when full-dress was demanded for the Opera—before Fop's Alley had ceased to be. Attendance there, especially for men, was more costly and troublesome than it is now; but, in many points, whereas the stage has since gained, the audience has lost in magnificence.—This is, perhaps, as it should be.—But, among that gorgeous assembly, I remember well the central figure in the blue robe, and the classical diadem adorned with cameos; who stood forth like a Sovereign in the midst of her subjects, with a grace and a majesty which put many a born Royalty and Ambassadress to shame. I saw her afterwards in "Otello," and in a poor opera by Meyer, "La Rosa rossa e la rosa bianca." This was in 1828.—The impression of those three nights was indelible, as "a thing of beauty," of might,—belonging to the highest world of high art, which nothing could overpass.—Ere I could return on it, I had heard with delight Sontag, Malibran, Grisi, successively; but none had displaced Madame Pasta, nor in the least interfered with her

supremacy, as possessing qualities and fascinations superior to theirs. As I thought in 1828, and in 1837—when she returned for a few performances, with her vocal powers painfully impaired—I think now, when writing these Recollections in 1861.

The way was long and laborious by which Madame Pasta arrived at her throne. The ninety-nine requisites of a singer (according to the well-known Italian adage) had been denied to her. Her voice was, originally, limited, husky, and weak—without charm, without flexibility — a mediocre *mezzo-soprano.* Though her countenance *spoke,* the features were cast in that coarse mould which is common in Italy.—Her arms were fine, but her figure was short and clumsy. She walked heavily —almost unequally. No candidate for musical sovereignty ever presented herself with what must have seemed a more slender and imperfect list of credentials—and by these, accordingly, she was rated at the outset of her career.

She was born at Como—biographical dictionaries tell us—in the year 1798; and, when about eighteen, after having received some training at Milan, was to be found among the insignificant myrmidons whom Catalani chose to assemble round her on the stage. It has been said that Giuditta Pasta was more than overlooked—openly flouted—in this very Opera House of ours, in the year 1817, and by a

wardrobe woman.—The affront may have done with her what neglect and insolence have done with other people of Genius—Byron among the rest.

At all events, whether roused by it or not, she subjected herself to a course of severe and incessant vocal study, to subdue and to utilize her voice. To equalize it was impossible. There was a portion of the scale which differed from the rest in quality, and remained to the last "under a veil," to use the Italian term. There were notes always more or less out of tune, especially at the commencement of her performances. Out of these uncouth materials she had to compose her instrument, and then to give it flexibility. Her studies to acquire execution must have been tremendous; but the volubility and brilliancy, when acquired, gained a character of their own, from the resisting peculiarities of the organ. There were a breadth, an expressiveness in her *roulades*, an evenness and solidity in her shake, which imparted to every passage a significance totally beyond the reach of lighter and more spontaneous singers.

Madame Pasta was understood to be a poor musician—a slow reader; but she had one of the most essential musical qualities in perfection—a sense for the measurement and proportion of time. This is more rare than it should be, and its absence

strangely often passes unperceived even by artists and amateurs, who are sensitively cultivated in other respects. It is not such mere correctness as is ensured by the metronome; not such artful licence in giving and taking as is apt to become artifice and affectation; but that instinctive feeling for propriety, which no lessons can teach—that due recognition of accent and phrase—it is that absence of flurry and exaggeration, such as make the discourse and behaviour of certain persons memorable in themselves, be the matter and occasion what they may —that intelligent composure without coldness, which at once impresses and reassures those who see and hear it.—As examples of what is meant, may be named Hummell, among pianoforte players—M. de Beriot and Herr David, among violinists. I may allude, among singers, to the noble artist in question — to M. Duprez — and to Madame Persiani.

But the greatest grace of all—depth and reality of expression — was possessed by this remarkable artist as few (I suspect) before her — as none whom I have since admired — have possessed it. The best of her audience were held in thrall, without being able to analyse what made up the spell, what produced the effect—so soon as she opened her lips.

Her recitative, from the moment when she en-

tered, was riveting by its truth. People accustomed to object to the conventionalities of Opera —just as loudly as if all Drama was not conventional, too—forgave the singing, and the strange language, for the sake of the direct and dignified appeal made by her declamation.—Madame Pasta never changed her readings, her effects, her ornaments.* What was to her true, when once arrived at, remained with her true for ever. To arrive at what stood with her for truth, she laboured, made experiments, rejected, with an elaborate care, the result of which, in one meaner or more meagre, must have been monotony. But the impression made on me was that of my being always subdued and surprised, for the first time. Though I knew what was coming—when the passion broke out, or when the phrase was sung, it seemed as if they were

* Of this a curious proof was given during the course of the two last disastrous appearances of Madame Pasta in England, made by her some years later. Nobody (the admirers of Rubini must forgive me) ever sang the great air from Pacini's "Niobe," "*Il soave e bel contento*," as Madame Pasta did—though everyone has tried to sing it. Her execution of it, at a provincial concert long ago, marks a period in my musical experiences. When she essayed to repeat it, at a concert for the Italian cause given some twenty years later—past middle age, out of practice, and with her voice in a state of wretched dilapidation (for which my epithet is not too strong), not a change, not a *cadenza* of the old times was left out. She called for them all, though "they would not come."

something new, electrical, immediate. The effect is as present to me at the moment of writing, as the impression made by the first sight of the sea—by the first snow-mountain—by the first hearing of the organ—by any of those first emotions which never utterly pass away. These things are totally distinct from the fanaticism of a *laudator temporis acti.* With honest people, I dare to believe and hope, Death only takes away the power of honest admiration.

The spell of Madame Pasta was, to the last, with some of us, unbroken. When she returned to England in 1837, and occupied a box in the centre of the dress-circle of the King's Theatre,—the Pit, as with one accord, turned towards her with such an immediate gaze of interest and welcome, as befits a royal personage.—I was afraid to see and to hear her again; aware of the illusions which eager persons are apt to cherish in regard to objects of early admiration. During this last visit referred to her voice was steadily out of tune, with some exceptional moments. Painful as this was to the ear, she was none the less the

"Queen
And wonder of the enchanted world of sound,"

in right of all those attributes which age cannot wither, neither custom stale. The grandeur of her style had undergone no decay—her wonderful mu-

sical perception was unimpaired; so were her incomparable taste, courage, and yet moderation, in ornament. She no longer looked the *Romeo* of Zingarelli's opera. Her first appearance distressed those who recollected her; but I *hear*, at this moment of writing, her large and stately delivery of a duett from "Aureliano in Palmyra" (I think) which was introduced by way of strengthening a score, sweet but feeble—and the passion and finish thrown into the airs, "*Sommo ciel*" and "*Ombra Adorata*."—These no one since Madame Pasta has been able to touch successfully: in the last, particularly, her rich and original ornaments gave a sort of superb Italian charm to the tomb-scene, in no respect contradicting that burst of despair from the heart with which, raising tenderly a long lock of hair from the brow of the deceased, she used to exclaim, "*Ah, mia Giulietta*."—I *see*, too, her magical and fearful *Medea*—a part musically and dramatically composed by herself, out of the faded book and correct music of Simone Mayer's opera. On the outward presentment of this, Time told, of course, less cruelly than in the case of her *Romeo*. The air of quiet, concentrated vengeance seeming to fill every fibre of her frame,—as if though deadly poison was flowing through her veins—with which she stood alone, wrapped in her scarlet mantle, as the bridal procession of *Jason* and *Creusa* swept

by,—is never to be forgotten. It must have been hard for those on the stage with her to pass that draped statue, with folded arms—that countenance lit up with awful fire, but as still as Death, and as inexorable as Doom.* Where, again, has ever been seen any exhibition of art grander than her *Medea's* struggle with herself ere she consents to murder her children?—than her hiding the dagger, with its fell purpose, upon her bosom, under the strings of her distracted hair?—than her steps to and fro, as of one drunken with frenzy—torn with the agonies of natural pity, yet still resolved on her

* This is not a mere hyperbole, thrust in for the sake of effect. I remember to have seen a stage-crowd absolutely appalled by an actress—Madame Viardot,—in the last act of "La Juive," at the Royal Italian Opera. She was supported on the stage, hardly conscious (as the luckless *Rachel)* of time, place, or the frightful fate so near—The odious drone of the death-music roused her. She raised her languid eyes, and saw the tremendous caldron in the distance. The scene demands that, shrinking to her father, the Jewess should say, "*Mon père! j'ai peur!*" (the exclamation loses much terror in the Italian translation). *Eleazar*, the Jew, was on the opposite side of the stage. His daughter disengaged herself from the executioners and tottered towards him, fascinated as by a basilisk by that hideous machine of torture; with her back to the audience. There have been few such impressions of mortal terror received in any theatre, as that conveyed to the audience by the countenances of every one on the stage, whom the gestures of the actress, seconded, no doubt, by the expression of her features, obviously terrified.

awful triumph? These memories are so many possessions to those who have seen them, so long as reason shall last; and their reality is all the more assured to me, because I have not yet fallen into the old man's habit of denying or doubting new sensations.

"There's always Morning somewhere in the world."

God be thanked!—there is always also Genius. I never thought of the *Medea* of Madame Pasta with greater enthusiasm of regard, than after enjoying, with sensations not less strong, the *Medea*, in spoken drama, of Madame Ristori. Nothing could be more different than the two performances —than the two plays (admitting an Opera to be a Play)—than the two women—than the two conceptions of the character of the magical enchantress. —But the past delight helped the present one, and the present justified the sincerity of the past.—There is no final and canonical treatment of any dramatic subject. There might, there *should* be yet, a new "Medea" as an Opera. Nothing can be grander, more antique, more Greek, than Cherubini's setting* of the "grand fiendish part" (to quote the words of Mrs. Siddons on *Lady Macbeth*). But, as music, it becomes simply impossible to be executed, so frightful is the strain on

* "Modern German Music," vol. 2, page 219—40.

the energies of her who is to present the heroine. Compared with this character, Beethoven's *Leonora*, Weber's *Euryanthe*, are only so much child's play.—There is a later "Medea," by Signor Pacini—a pretty version of the tremendous story. The real presentment of it in music may be yet to come—supposing the taste for ancient fable not to die out:—and so, too, there *may* be a new enchantress, differing in every respect from the two superb Italian women of genius, who have wrought out the first idea—each incomparably.

There remains a strange scene to be spoken of—the last appearance of this magnificent musical artist, when she allowed herself, many years later, to be seduced into giving one performance at Her Majesty's Theatre, and to sing in a concert for the Italian cause at the Royal Italian Opera. Nothing more inadvised could have been dreamed of. Madame Pasta had long ago thrown off the stage and all its belongings; and any other public than those who have made their boatmen linger on the lake of Como, hard beneath the garden walls of her villa, with the hope of catching a glimpse of one who in her prime had enthralled so many.—Her voice, which, at its best, had required ceaseless watching and practice, had been long ago given up by her. Its state of utter ruin on the

night in question passes description.—She had been neglected by those who, at least, should have presented her person to the best advantage admitted by Time.—Her queenly robes (she was to sing some scenes from "Anna Bolena") in nowise suited or disguised her figure. Her hairdresser had done some tremendous thing or other with her head — or rather, had left everything undone. A more painful and disastrous spectacle could hardly be looked on.—There were artists present, who had then, for the first time, to derive some impression of a renowned artist—perhaps, with the natural feeling that her reputation had been exaggerated.—Among these was Rachel—whose bitter ridicule of the entire sad show made itself heard throughout the whole theatre, and drew attention to the place where she sat—one might even say, sarcastically enjoying the scene. Among the audience, however, was another gifted woman, who might far more legitimately have been shocked at the utter wreck of every musical means of expression in the singer — who might have been more naturally forgiven, if some humour of self-glorification had made her severely just—not worse — to an old *prima donna*;—I mean, Madame Viardot.—Then, and not till then, she was hearing Madame Pasta.—But Truth will always answer to the appeal of Truth. Dismal as was the

spectacle—broken, hoarse, and destroyed as was the voice—the great style of the singer spoke to the great singer. The first scene was *Ann Boleyn's* duett with *Jane Seymour*. The old spirit was heard and seen in Madame Pasta's "*Sorgi!*" and the gesture with which she signed to her penitent rival to rise. Later, she attempted the final mad scene of the opera—that most complicated and brilliant among the mad scenes on the modern musical stage—with its two *cantabile* movements, its snatches of recitative, and its *bravura* of despair, which may be appealed to as an example of vocal display, till then unparagoned, when turned to the account of frenzy, not frivolity—perhaps as such commissioned by the superb creative artist.—By that time, tired, unprepared, in ruin as she was, she had rallied a little. When—on *Ann Boleyn's* hearing the coronation music for her rival, the heroine searches for her own crown on her brow.—Madame Pasta wildly turned in the direction of the festive sounds, the old irresistible charm broke out;—nay, even in the final song, with its *roulades*, and its scales of shakes, ascending by a semitone, the consummate vocalist and tragedian, able to combine form with meaning—the moment of the situation, with such personal and musical display as form an integral part of operatic art—was indicated: at least to the apprehension of a younger artist.—"You are right!"

was Madame Viardot's quick and heartfelt response (her eyes full of tears) to a friend beside her—"You are right! It is like the *Cenacolo* of Da Vinci at Milan—a wreck of a picture, but the picture is the greatest picture in the world!"

THE YEAR 1838.

OPERAS.

"Falstaff."* — *Balfe.* "La Sonnambula." — *Bellini.* "Lucia,"* "Parisina."* — *Donizetti.* "Don Giovanni," "Le Nozze di Figaro."—*Mozart.* "Otello," "Matilda di Shabran."—*Rossini.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Persiani.* Grisi. Albertazzi. Ekerlin.* Caremoli.* —MM. Tati.* Borrani.* Rubini. Tamburini. Morelli.* Lablache. F. Lablache.

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Taglioni. Teresa and Fanny Elssler.

THE YEAR 1838.

FROM the list of performances this year it will be seen how entirely Signor Rossini's star had waned. A new singer had been added to the company, by whose agency a new composer was set in the place, which he has since maintained. The singer was Madame Persiani—the composer was Donizetti.

His "Parisina," though it was superbly acted by Madame Grisi and Signor Tamburini, did not please—his "Lucia" *did.*

The third new opera was Mr. Balfe's "Falstaff," one of the many chances which this man of indisputable genius has been fortunate enough to obtain—I must add, willing to fling away.—There has been hardly a great singer in Europe, since the year 1834, for whom he has not been called on to write;—hardly a great and successful theatre in which his works have not been heard. He has

the gift—now rare, in late days—of melody, and a certain facile humour for the stage, which can hardly be over-prized. His tunes are in our streets:—but his best works cannot be said to last.

The reason for this may be found partly in a certain unsettlement of style, not to be confounded with eclecticism; for, in spite of its being neither purely French, Italian, nor German, the opera-music of Cherubini, Spontini, or Meyerbeer, lasts in esteem. Each of the three distinguished men may be designated as "composite;"—yet each differs from each in his marked individuality. With something of his own, there is something, not so much of every country, as of every composer, in Mr. Balfe's music. Here we meet an Italian rhythm, there a French interval—anon a German harmony, sometimes a strain of artless Irish melody.—The listener most ready at identification would be puzzled to pronounce on the parentage of one of his English operas, from the music itself—still more from those written by him to foreign text. This characteristic is too general among our composers who have written for the stage during the past five-and-twenty years. Perhaps it has been always so—as Arne's "Artaxerxes" (the one serions English opera which kept the stage) reminds us.

Not further to venture on ground very delicate to be trodden—other reasons for the ephemeral

duration of Mr. Balfe's operas may be cited:—his disregard of character, accent, and situation, for the sake of catching effects;—and his peculiar taste in instrumentation. The latter, though sometimes effective, sometimes piquant, is too often thin; the stringed instruments are so carelessly grouped as to lose that nourishing sonority, which is to the body of sound a central support, analogous to that which the spine affords to the human frame.

The above may be so generally remarked as peculiarities in this fertile and successful composer's writings, that comment on them is no more indelicate than on the spasmodic climax of Signor Verdi, or on M. Meyerbeer's particular habit of self-interruption. Owing to them it may be, that of "Falstaff" only the animated *trio* of the two wives—Madame Grisi and Mademoiselle Caremoli and *Anne Page*, Madame Albertazzi—lives to tell the tale of Shakespeare's "Merry Wives," set in Italian for England by an Irishman, and with such a French-Neapolitan artist for its protagonist as would have made Shakespeare's heart leap for joy to look on.

The crowd at the revival of "Le Nozze di Figaro" is a thing to recollect. So crammed was the theatre—and the audience overflowed on the stage, in such a resolute swarm, that the curtain could not be raised for half an hour, by reason of

their intrusion. The contest to keep and to clear the space approached a riot, within a narrow step. The *Figaro* was Lablache; the *Almaviva* was Signor Tamburini. Madame Grisi was too indifferent as *Susanna* — she never took to the opera kindly. Madame Persiani sang the music of the *Countess* like a true artist; and, though her voice was not one which blended willingly with any other *soprano*, the letter duett was excellently given by the two ladies.

Setting aside Madame Persiani, the new arrivals of the year were failures. Madame Ekerlin was a worn-out singer, who still had been trained in a good school; Mademoiselle Caremoli, a nonentity;—Signor Tati, a tenor thoroughly amusing, as every fat lover, whose broad face beams with delight in its owner's own huge legs,—and who has a small piping voice, must be. His *Elvino* in "La Sonnambula," and his complacency therein, are not to be forgotten.

MADAME PERSIANI.

THIS most accomplished singer was always a greater favourite with the artists and the connoisseurs than with the public,—for reasons easy to explain.

Never was there woman less vulgar, in physiognomy or in manner, than she; but never was there one whose appearance on the stage was less distinguished. She was not precisely insignificant to see, so much as pale, plain, and anxious. She gave the impression of one who had left sorrow or sickness at home; and who therefore, (unlike those wonderful deluders, the French actresses, who, because they will not be ugly, rarely *look* so), had resigned every question of personal attraction as a hopeless one. She was singularly tasteless in her dress. Her one good point was her hair;—which was splendidly profuse, and of an agreeable colour.

Then, such even sensual charm as her voice may,

in its early days, have possessed, had been left on the other side of the Alps ere she appeared in Paris and London. It was an acute *soprano*, mounting to E flat *altissimo*—acrid and piercing rather than sweet, penetrating rather than full, and always liable to rise in pitch;—a voice, in the sound of which, considered as sound, no one could by any possibility find pleasure; one, too, which, owing to the peculiar qualities described, never blended with other voices willingly.—These defects combined would, with ninety-nine out of a hundred women, have amounted to a chasm betwixt their owner and public favour, to be bridged over by no magic. What made matters worse was, that their owner had to cope with an artist then so resplendent as Madame Grisi; and, worst of all, that passionate action was beyond her reach.

Madame Persiani, however, had one excellent quality, the might and completeness of which made the want of many others forgiven by the public—forgotten by all real judges and artists—and which enabled her to keep the stage, as an invaluable and admirable member of a first-rate Opera company—till Nature failed her.

She was such a mistress of the art of singing as few women in our, or in any time, have been. Her father, Tacchinardi, the tenor, though among the most unsightly to look on of men—null as an

actor—and of whose voice there is little on record—knew every secret of his art, having, on the one hand, a fair knowledge of instrumental effects, and, on the other, having modelled himself after "the famous tenor, Babbini."* Most, if not all, that he knew, Tacchinardi imparted to his daughter. Her voice was developed to its utmost capacities. Every fibre of her frame seemed to have a part in her singing. There was nothing left out—nothing kept back. She was never careless, never unfinished; always sedulous—sometimes to the edge of strain (I speak of her as a singer)—and occasionally, in the employment of her vast and varied resources, rising to an animation which, if not sympathetic as warmth kindling warmth, amounted to that display of conscious power which is resistless. The perfection with which she wrought up certain songs—such as the "Sonnambula" *finale*, or the mad scene in "Lucia"—if considered in respect to style, and to what

* Yet Tacchinardi, whose voice and method were admirable enough to make ugliness almost amounting to deformity forgiven, was singing the music of Pucitta, Paisiello, and Zingarelli, so lately as 1815, in Paris;—only left the stage of Italy and Spain in 1831, and died very recently. Of Babbini, whose career ranged betwixt 178— and 1802, still less notice remains, save that he sung in operas by Niccolini and Mayer, and was in 1835 supposed by M. Fètis to be still living.

style can do—has not in my experience been exceeded—has been very rarely approached.

She had the finest possible sense of accent—a gift, as I may have somewhere else said, sparingly given;—one hardly to be acquired by those who possess it not by nature. From her, every phrase had its fullest measure. Every group of notes was divided, and expressed by her with as much precision as the best of violinists (who *has* the gift of accent) brings into his bowing.—And this was done with that secure musical ease, which made her anxious, mournful face, and her acute, acid voice, forgotten.—It mattered not whether the movement was as rapid as the *stretto* in the known duett of Donizetti's "Linda," with its *staccato* theme—as one of the florid passages of eight quavers in common time, twice or four times divided, such as abound in the Rossinian operas;—or whether it was some *largo*, large and expressive, such as the well-known "*Che mi frena*" from the second act of "Lucia"—Madame Persiani's *attack* (thus to present the French word "*aplomb*") was not more unfailing, than the delicate sensibility with which she gave every note its fullest value—never herself becoming breathless—rarely heavy. This was the second of her rare musical qualities and attractions.

The third (perhaps the *first* with the least thinking part of the public) was her taste and extra-

ordinary facility in ornament. Whether she invented or commissioned her changes and *cadenzas*, is not to be ascertained easily; but she rarely produced one which was wrong in style; and, in many of her songs, exhibited a variety, more or less brilliant, in proportion as she was better or worse in voice. Strange to add, her shake (a grace which it is the humour of the day to contemn) was the least brilliant of her executive passages.—In every other form of accomplishment she was incomparable among Italians: always trying to throw some expression into her embroideries and flourishes—thereby, however, less voluble, less easy, than certain great executive artists of other countries—such as Sontag, or Madame Cinti-Damoreau, or a later French singer or two who could be named.

The only time (to illustrate) that I recollect Madame Persiani short of the mark, was once when she chose to introduce the great show-song of *Angela* from M. Auber's "Domino Noir" into the lesson-scene of "Il Barbiére." There she was heavy. On the other hand, nothing could be more poignant, clear, audacious, ready to the moment, than her execution of the variations to Paisiello's "*Nel cor:*"—a form of vocal music originated in obedience to Catalani's bad taste. Certain of her freaks and fancies in this (in particular, a variation, on enormously distant intervals), recur to me

as best among the best of exhibitions of the kind.

"The kind" is now disdained. Such absurd use of the voice by way of instrument, as these *solfeggi* imply, can hardly be too severely disdained, whether the place be the stage, or some arena, where such warbling is wanted as the birds give without teaching,—and not beauty and sentiment enriched by ornament. But, because of these abuses, to disdain altogether the science of vocal ornament as superfluous, absurd, meretricious, is equivalent to preferring the brute diamond, spoiled from the Hindoo, to the same jewel when all its lustre has been brought out, and when, after having been set by art, it strikes its fire to far and dark places from the crown of some Christian Prince.—The new-fangled pedantry, which declares, that a composer writing for singers shall avoid everything showing that they know how to sing, if carried out to its extreme, would simply make an end of Music—bring us back to the tom-tom and the tortoise-shell lute, and abrogate all that Science and Culture have done. A wigwam may be sincere in point of architecture, (and there be those now who could discourse eloquently on the wigwam as the best of buildings). A Gregorian chant may be awkward in its intervals, and thereby wholesome and nourishing, because hard to swallow.—It may be unfortunate for the world that we cannot return to the

sincerity of wigwams, or to the crude symmetry of the Gregorian chants; but we cannot do this, at least, without a protest against the barbarisms in which we are invited to find aliment, rest, and enjoyment.—In Art, no one perfection extinguishes another. So far from this, apart from all eclecticism, (because eclecticism is an affair of mind rather than of material), one perfection embellishes another—giving room for individual display,—and keeping the while, high and intact, the supremacy of poetical thought and invention over forms of utterance.

"So many hard and pompous words about a few flourishes?"—The whole life and perpetuation of the art of singing, and of composition for the voice, are involved in the question, into considering which my recollections of Madame Persiani's admirable accomplishments have accidentally broken the way. Every conceivable passage was by her finished to perfection—the shake, as I have said, excepted, which might be thought indistinct and thin. In the attack of intervals, distant one from the other—in the climbing up a series of groups of notes, ascending to the highest notes of the scale—she was unrivalled. Her variety, too, was great. When she was *encored*, she rarely repeated her *cabaletta* without some change or enhancement to its brilliancy. When she was uncertain as to the

state of her powers, (a matter of frequent occurrence), she could retrench, and substitute graces so acceptable, as to conceal from her audience that her voice was more weary or less strong than she could wish it to be.

How convincingly these rare and remarkable merits were felt, when, after a few years of absence from our stage, Madame Persiani reappeared in London—how, in comparison with her, her younger successors sounded like so many immature scholars of the second class—may appear in the course of these remembrances.

On her gala-nights, to the last, the spirit—the splendour, it may be said—of her expressive execution, was irresistible.—I remember, especially, one evening, when she sang the part of *Amenaide*, at the *Royal Italian Opera*, in "Tancredi," with Mademoiselle Alboni—as a perfect revel of vocal skill—daring, triumphant, perfect—riveting by its display of art. It was with reference to some such performance that Mendelssohn—true German as he was, but just to Italy, as few German musicians are now-a-days—said, to the amazement of the pedantic few among his audience, "Well, I do like Madame Persiani, dearly. She is such a thorough artist, and she sings so earnestly,—and there is such a pleasant, *bitter* tone in her voice!"

DONIZETTI'S OPERAS.

CHARACTERISTICS.

THIS was the year when Donizetti was recognized in England, thanks to the sensation made by Rubini and Madame Persiani in "Lucia." Italian Opera music has declined so sadly since he wrote, (the vogue of Signor Verdi admitted), that it is something like taking leave of the subject to attempt a character of this facile, fertile man. There was much in him to value—something peculiar to apprehend, alien to certain habits of mind and sympathy. I find myself thinking of his music, as I do of Domenichino's pictures of "St. Agnes" and the "Rosario" in the Bologna gallery—of the "Diana" in the Borghese Palace at Rome—as pictures equable and skilful in the treatment of their subjects, neither devoid of beauty of form nor of colour, but which make neither the pulse

quiver nor the eye wet;—and then, such a sweeping impression is arrested by a work like the "St. Jerome" in the Vatican, from which a spirit comes forth, so strong and so exalted, that the beholder, howsoever trained to examine, and compare, and collect, finds himself raised above all recollections of manner, by the sudden ascent of Talent into the higher world of Genius.—Essentially a second-rate composer, Donizetti struck out some first-rate things in a happy hour—such as the last act of "La Favorite."

He is remarkable as an instance of freshness of fancy, brought on by incessant manufacture. Such a change is almost exclusively confined to Italian genius, in its workings. It learns, and grows, while creating. If it be moved by no deep purpose, it avails itself of self-correction; it strengthens its force on unconscious experience.—Whereas German after German has gone deeper and deeper into fog-land, when aspiring to produce what Music cannot give—Italian after Italian has not merely perfected his own peculiar style, but has enlarged his science and arrived at novelty, at a period of his career when it might have been fancied that nothing but truism remained to be given out.

The "craft" belonging to incessant production has been too much despised.—The Scholar can retire for a quarter of a century to elaborate works

for scholars to come, and has his just and high reward, accordingly.—Those (on the other hand) who wish to speak less learnedly to the public, can hardly present themselves to the public too often.—They may never make themselves scholars by retreat or reserve;—but they may nerve their powers of expression by exercise, if it be accompanied by self-scrutiny.—Cavillers have too pedantically assumed that, by restriction and concentration, creative genius could with all men be *forced* into becoming something far more precious than it may have originally been.—In Music, at least, this is a huge and untenable fallacy.—Dangerous though it seem to afford encouragement to idleness, to presumption, to invention by chance, to a spirit of money-making cupidity, the perpetuation of falsehood is yet more dangerous:—and there are few falsehoods more complete than the reproach conveyed in the above assertions.—With few exceptions, all the great musical composers have been fertile when once educated,—and capable of writing with as much rapidity as ease. Bach, Handel (whose "Israel" was completed in three weeks), Haydn (more of whose compositions are lost than live), Mozart—all men remarkable as *discoverers*, and renowned as classic authors—held the pens of ready writers. Signor Rossini's "Il Barbiére," again, which has now kept the stage for upwards of half a century, was the work

of thirteen days—the *insouciant* composer being spurred to his utmost by a disparaging letter from Paisiello, who had already set Beaumarchais' comedy.—It was the empty Connoisseur, who thought to gain reputation, by declaring that "the picture would have been better painted if the painter had taken more trouble." Nor—to illustrate from another world—will it ever be forgotten, that the "Bride of Lammermoor," the masterpiece of Walter Scott (whose defence of fertility, *apropos* of Dryden, might be quoted as germane to the matter,) was thrown off when the Novelist was hardly conscious of what he wrote, owing to racking bodily pain.—Those on whom the gift of fertility has been bestowed, run some danger of becoming "nothing if not fertile,"—timid, restrained, affected. Their minds are impulsive rather than thoughtful—their fancies are strengthened by the very process and passion of pouring them forth.

In the case of Donizetti, it is obvious that his invention was, year by year, becoming enlarged by incessant use and practice.—There are no melodies in any of his earlier works so delicious as those of the Quartett and Serenade in "Don Pasquale." His instrumentation, too, always correct, became richer and more fanciful with each successive effort. It has elsewhere been remarked that,

considering Donizetti was called to write for particular singers, an unusual number of the operas thus fashioned to order have become stock pieces: thereby proved to be essentially superior to the generality of works of their class.

He was born at Bergamo, in 1797; he was trained by Simon Mayer at Bologna; he was drawn for a soldier in 1816, and extricated himself by the small gains from his first opera, "Enrico di Borgogna," produced at Venice. Then came some score of operas—all forgotten, except, perhaps, "Il Borgomastro di Saardam," for the sake of a poor but tuneable duett. His twenty-first was "L'Esule di Roma," of which some mention has been made;—his thirty-second was "Anna Bolena."—Thirty-three more were to come ere the brain of the busy man perished, under the influences of an unbridled life of indulged appetite. Gradually—Signor Rossini remaining silent, Bellini dead, and Signor Verdi as yet partially owned—Donizetti became the man to whom Europe looked for Italian Opera.

"Lucia" would generally be named as Donizetti's best opera. I am not able to share in the admiration it has excited. Never, assuredly, was a story so full of suggestion for music as Scott's "Bride of Lammermoor," tamed into such insipid nothingness, even by an Italian librettist, as this.*

* It had been already treated by Signor Caraffa; who

The supernatural tone of the legend entirely taken way;—the dance on the bridal night, with its ghastly interruption, replaced by a sickly scene of madness, such as occur by scores in every southern serious opera;—the funeral, with its one superfluous mourner and unbidden guest, abolished, to make room for the long final scene so cherished by tenors;—the character of *Lady Ashton*, affording such admirable material for contrast, obliterated—here are so many injuries to one of the most moving tragic tales existing in any literature.—It would be a good deed to arrange Scott's novel anew—and anew to set it.

For only in one scene—that of the contract, which closes the second act—is Donizetti equal to the occasion. In the first act may be noticed a slight trait, meant to be Scotch, in the opening chorus;—and the slow movement for two voices in the duett by the Mermaiden's Well. The song of entrance for the heroine, like others of Donizetti's show-songs, is faded, in spite of the opportunities for the vocalist which it contains. In the second act, the letter-duett, so high in favour with baritones who love to rage, is a piece of sounding platitude. In the concerted *finale* to the second act, its *crescendo* of passion (how admirably animated when

treated also, in his day, "Massaniello"—both works forgotten now.

Signor Tamburini supported and spurred it!) repeats the working-out of a form already indicated in the first *finale* of "Anna Bolena."—The "malediction" *solo* of *Edgardo* is in the true style of operatic declamation.—He who speaks ill of the third act, closed by its long-drawn death-scene (the darling scene of tenor singers), may prepare himself to be stoned for heresy. Yet, throughout that scene (with the exception of the dialogue between *Ravenswood* and the chorus), there is to be found little beyond singer's effects, a sadly small amount of vigour or freshness in the musical treatment of the situation—nothing to be compared with analogous passages in "Lucrezia Borgia," or even in that less popular work, (a very fine specimen of the master, nevertheless), "Marino Faliero."

Donizetti's best serious music (as I have said) is to be found in "La Favorite." In this opera —written originally to another book, for Paris, and altered and extended when transferred to the *Grand Opera*—there is musical and dramatic beauty enough to make a story painful to the verge of vileness, forgiven.—The chorus, with dance, which heralds the appearance of the King's Mistress, protectress of the youth whom she has allured to break his monastic vows, is delicious.—The anathema-scene in the second act is forcible; the romance for the baritone, is one of the best romances written for the

voice.—There is a voluptuous tone in the heroine's grand air, in the third act, which raises it above the commonplace level of similar *scenas*, and there is no song more becoming to a singer who has the needful voice and warmth of conception.—The fourth act, it has been said, was showered out on paper during an incredibly brief period, and at the last moment. There is no church-chant on the stage more solemn and affecting than the hymn in the monastery (a good example of the deep pathos which is consistent with the use of the major key). So passionate is the romance for the tenor, that it is hardly possible to sing it without effect.—As given by such singers as M. Duprez and Signor Mario, it is to be ranked among the most thrilling songs of the Italian stage; yet it is built on one of the simplest scale passages. The duett which closes the opera rises still higher in emotion in the ecstacy of despair, succeeded by almost delirious exaltation. The *stretto* is hardly possible to spoil, so resistless is the sweep of the rhythm—provided it be only sung in time.—The only singer of any merit from whose lips it has failed to move our audiences, has been Signor Giuglini, whose delight in his clear and finished tones often seduces him into a languor devoid of proportion and measure, which, in music like that of the movement alluded to, becomes fatiguing and

fatal.—On the whole, this fourth act is Donizetti's noblest serious music. The ideas pertain to the situations, and are always striking; the voices are judiciously employed and displayed; the orchestral portion is treated with care. In "La Favorite," he proved himself worthy of admission to the stage which a Rossini and a Meyerbeer had studied with solicitude.

Among his comic operas, "L'Elisir" is the general favourite; but here, again, I fancy the popular judgment may be hardly fair. In "L'Elisir" the Italian composer had to measure himself against the brilliant Frenchman, M. Auber, who, in the prime of his vivacity, treated the selfsame subject, as "Le Philtre." The gaiety of "L'Elisir" is flat and characterless as compared with that of "La Figlia dell' Reggimento"—a work which, having been tepidly received with the French text to which it was written, has gained universal acceptance out of Paris,—and, under translation, has established itself as among the brightest and the last of comic Italian operas. There is a careless gaiety amounting to merriment—there is a frankness, always military, never vulgar—in this music. One might fancy it to have been thrown off during some sunny period of high spirits, when the well-spring of melody was in a sparkling humour. It is slight,

it is familiar, it is catching—it is everything that pedants find easy to condemn.

I happened once in London to hear it laid hold of by a party of such connoisseurs, including more than one composer, who would have found it hard to write eight bars having the faintest echo of hilarity in them. Some were decrying it, too, for the poor reason of anticipating the presumed censure of the one Genius of the company. This was Mendelssohn. He let them rail their fill for a while, saying nothing. Then he began to move restlessly on his chair.

"Well, I don't know," said he, at last; "I am afraid I like it. I think it very pretty—it is so merry." Then, bursting into one of those fits of hearty gaiety which lit up his beautiful countenance in a manner never to be forgotten, "Do you know," said he, "I should like to have written it myself!"

The dismay and wonderment of the classicists, who had made sure of his support, were truly droll.

The last of Donizetti's operas—the last comic opera worth having which Italy, once so gay, has yielded—"Don Pasquale," was written in a few weeks, when that bodily exhaustion had begun which was so soon to take the form of mental imbecility, followed by Death. Under such circumstances, that the sixty-fifth opera, of one who

had for a quarter of a century been supplying the stage, should have any freshness at all, is marvellous;—more marvellous that the music should prove its composer's very freshest.—The entrance of the coquettish *Norina*—the duett betwixt herself and her brother which closes the first act;—in the second act, the entire *finale*, during which the widow springs a mine of provocations against the foolish old uncle of the man she intends to marry, including one of Donizetti's most individual concerted pieces—the quartett;—in the third, the exquisite *serenade* behind the scenes—bear no traces of a weary brain—of a hand in which the numbness of palsy was already working. It is true, the master was incited to do his best, for a quartett no less admirable than Madame Grisi, Signor Mario, and Tamburini, and Lablache. How they seemed to revel in the light music to this airy comedy—after having borne one another company through many direful stories, set to violent sounds!—For the present, it may be feared that we have taken leave of mirth in Italian music, and must look for it in the Comic Opera of Paris—and, even in the home of Grètry, Boieldieu, Auber, and Adam, the fountain of laughter seems to be slowly dwindling and drying up.—We are becoming graver, without becoming more learned; we are showing our ambition, at the expense of our command over

Melody. Compare, for instance, the old trio, "*Lei faccio*," from "Il Matrimonio," with any other modern *trio* for three female voices—say that from Mr. Balfe's "Falstaff," or that from M. Halévy's "Fée aux Roses," (in which there is some *finesse*, as in all that M. Halévy writes,) and the poverty of the time, in fancy and in power of treating the voice effectively, and the absence of real gaiety becomes dolefully evident.—Nay, as decay inevitably engenders decay, the very art of instrumental combination and effect for which so much has been sacrificed—is in course of deterioration, owing to careless treatment, under the pretext of dash and originality.

To return from this digression—a peculiarity or two remain to be pointed out. The amount of characteristic music produced by Donizetti is very small. There is not one March, or good Waltz, or Minuet, in any of his works. There is nothing to pair off with the March in "Norma," or with the *Polacca* in "I Puritani." Some of his overtures are written with care—as, for instance, that to "Maria di Rohan," produced to propitiate Vienna, and the one to "Linda;" but there is none which arrests the ear.—He had a way of his own in grouping voices.—He employed the device, so abused by Signor Verdi, of unisonal effect, with transparency and skill—and is,

accordingly, oftentimes more forcible, though less noisy, than his successor. His works demand, and repay, real singers, showing the latter to advantage without straining them. He wrote comparatively little for that most expressive of voices, the *contralto*—though, that he could write charmingly for it, the parts of *Pierrotto*, in "Linda," and of *Gondi*, in "Maria di Rohan," remain to prove. Compared with the music of these, the more popular "*Brindisi*," in "Lucrezia," is chargeable with vulgarity. Though not enterprising in his instrumentation, he was neither meagre nor incorrect.—In short, it may be said that, though there be no startling beauties in the operas of Donizetti,—none of those seizing melodies which, like "*Di tanti*," or "*Largo al factotum*," or "*Assisa al pie d'un salice*," ring through the world,—neither such intensity of sentiment as reconciles us to the very limited alphabet in which Bellini wrote,—they contain so much of what is agreeable, so many happy combinations and excellent opportunities for vocal display, such frequent harmony between the sounds and the situations to be pourtrayed,—as to justify musical annalists in giving the fertile master a high place in the records of his time.

THE YEAR 1839.

OPERAS.

"La Sonnambula," "I Puritani," "Norma."—*Bellini.* "Belisario,"* "Anna Bolena," "Lucrezia Borgia,"* "L'Elisir d'Amore."*—*Donizetti.* "Otello," "La Cenerentola," "Guillaume Tell."*—*Rossini.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Monnani.* Alban Croft.* Grisi. Persiani. Ernesta Grisi.* Pauline Garcia.*—MM. Tati. F. Lablache. Rubini. Lablache. Tamburini. Mario.*

BALLETS.

"Robert Le Diable."*—"Un Nuit de Bal."*—"La Gitana."*—"La Gipsy."*

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Taglioni. Fanny Elssler.

THE YEAR 1839.

By this year's list of operas it will be seen that the ascendancy of Donizetti's music was on the increase. It was the first year in England of his "Lucrezia Borgia," since so associated with the names of Madame Grisi and Signor Mario. The only other opera, unknown, though not precisely new, which was presented, was Signor Rossini's "Guillaume Tell." "Lucrezia" took hold of London from the first moment—though it is not Donizetti's best work. Signor Rossini's masterpiece has never done so, till this year of writing, (1861).

Such fact in no respect determines the value of the music accepted or rejected—merely figuring as one item, in a long list of similar cases. Dear as is Mozart's "Zauberflöte" to all musicians and lovers of melody, on the stage that opera has been only

tolerated.—The reason, in both cases, is the same —the stupidity of the story.—It would appear, as I have remarked, as if the greatest of Italians had taken a despotic pride in choosing a subject, without reference to dramatic treatment, and without a leading female interest, always of the first importance to Opera, be the part long or brief.

The music, however, will grow, so long as Music lives and lasts. Year by year will be more and more seen the rare and characteristic beauty royally showered over the work, from its earliest to its latest note. In the long opening act—with no incident whatsoever till the *finale* is reached, and that incident (the flight of a culprit) one belonging to mechanist rather than to actor—the freshness and charm, and Swiss character of the music, sustain the opera —though such heroine as it possesses has not till then appeared. Not to speak of the Overture, (in which the Storm and the opening of the Quick-Step are open to cavil—the close of the latter movement redeeming the purility of the theme by its amazing animation), the opening chorus and quartett, the concerted close of the first scene, with the well-known "*Ranz des Vaches*" so wonderfully interwoven—the duett for the two principal men, the bridal chorus, the *ballet* music—lastly, the *finale*, including its prayer, and its vehement, anxious *stretto*—cling to the ear and the heart with

such power, that nothing beyond music is thought of, or desired.

After this comes a second act, unparagoned in Opera-writing; composed of five pieces worth dwelling on for a moment—though it is needless, in a work so familiar, to detail one by one the situations which they represent.—The first gives the tone of the scene and the hour—a hunting-chorus, opening with a flourish of horns, and the shout of the gathered mountain rangers. A simpler melody could not be found, nor yet one more clear of the vulgarity which a triple rhythm, and the restricted powers of the instruments employed, are somewhat apt to stamp upon all music *à la chasse*:—But, it is evening, and a pause allows the measured chime of a distant bell to be heard, with a sunset hymn of herdsmen accompanying in mellow harmony the decline of day, and the approach of a time of repose. The burden of the hunters' song is resumed, with a diminished vivacity; there is a *farewell* in the reiterated notes and the dying fall of the wind instruments, and in the detached tones given to the voices as the singers withdraw, leaving the margin of the lake to the stars and the dew, silent and lonely—the very field for Expectation. And Expectation (unless Fantasy has misled me into the folly of Sterne's simile maker) is expressed strongly in the second change—in *Matilda's* recita-

tive and romance which follow — from the first symphony to the close of the air, —which is built on a phrase so expressive, that it is next to impossible that a singer should utter it coldly. The calm of the hour, the gentle stir of leaves, the murmur of night airs across the bosom of the lake, are not more strongly expressed in the accompaniment, than the tenderness and anxiety of human affection in the vocal part. But Expectation is not to be fruitless. The third change opens out its fulfilment: the passionate dialogue—the delicious repose of mutual confession —the rapture of assured love. It would seem hard, at its close, to sustain the excitement to which the hearer has been wrought. This, however, Rossini has sustained — nay, surpassed — in the fourth musical piece of the act;—where the lover is aroused from his dream by his indignant friends, and where the struggle betwixt Passion and Patriotism is stirred by their detailing to him that his own father has become a victim to Gessler's tyrannous cruelty; till the desire to avenge his country at length absorbs every softer feeling. I know not whether it has ever occurred to any one beside myself, that in the leading idea, both of the commencement and of the close of this Trio, a distant but not indistinct reminiscence of "La Marseillaise" is traceable. Be this as it may, courage never uttered its unselfish defiance with a more enkind-

ling animation than in the final Tyrtean hymn. The *finale* to the second act—the last of the five gradations mentioned—has yet to be spoken of. It was well done of Rossini, after the Trio, to allow an interval of comparative repose—the occasion being furnished by the covert approach and gradual entrance of the men of the three Cantons. What invention is here!—what variety! How characteristic and distinct is the music of each tribe; yet how naturally and solidly are the three different airs bound together by a few emphatic and significant phrases, till they burst out in the inspiriting triple chorus, "*Guillaume, tu le vois!*" and afterwards reply to the hero's address, in antiphony, which, wrought up to a climax, leads to the solemn dedication of their swords and lives to the cause of freedom! Here, the situation is far more the work of the musician than of the poet, so intensely picturesque and appropriate is the chain of movements by which the effect is wrought up. At first we have snatches of melody, like the sighing of the night-wind over the shadowy lake, and among the columnar pines; then airs, which themselves suggest motion, and number, and diversity of costume; then an outburst of fiery impatience; then the stern catechism, and the eager reply; and, lastly, a whole people devoting itself to a noble

purpose, in the presence of their ancestral mountains." *

The wondrous beauty of this act—though sustained by singers no less admirable than Madame Persiani,† and Signor Rubini, Tamburini, and Lablache—could not, twenty years ago, save the opera in England. Sedulously prepared as it was, the public had not become used to grand musical Drama, and preferred any musical melodrama of Donizetti, because of the scope for acting afforded by the story.

Two singers, who have since, in widely different orbits, set the world on fire, were brought forward this year.

The new Garcia—sister to Malibran—the new tenor—demand separate future studies.—Suffice it here to say, that the first appeared, in her girlhood, for the first time on any stage, as *Desdemona*, with an amount of musical accomplishment, and of original genius, the combination of which was unique. Signor Mario had been trained at the

* I have transferred this passage from a former work out of print—"Music and Manners in France and North Germany."

† A cadence made by this lady, at the close of "*Sombres forèts*," lives to be remembered, as one of the happiest, most fearless, most characteristic, and best executed pieces of ornament which I have ever heard, even from Madame Persiani.

Grand Opera of Paris before he sang here in public. There, the charm of his voice and appearance, and the elegance of his manner, had already, though imperfectly, asserted themselves. I had seen and heard him there, in a now-forgotten opera by M. Halévy, "Le Drapier;" but I have not to this day forgotten the skill there shown by him in his dress, the beauty of his tones (then belonging to the half-cultivated voice of an amateur), nor his expressive saying of a *romance*, of which the burden was "*un seul instant.*" —When he appeared here, in "Lucia," the vocal command which he afterwards gained was unthought of; —his acting did not then get beyond that of a southern man with a strong feeling for the stage. But physical beauty and geniality, such as have been bestowed on few—a certain artistic taste—a certain "distinction," not exclusively belonging to gentle birth, but sometimes associated with it—made it clear, from Signor Mario's first hour of stage-life, that a course of no common order of fascination was begun.—Pity, that events should be of such frequent occurrence, as the singer not beginning to sing well till the bloom is off his voice—as the actor not being able to act till Time has thinned his flowing hair, and channelled the round cheek, and set a knob in the Grecian throat!—Such has not been, altogether, Signor Mario's case. Nevertheless, his best triumphs have

come, not so much in the noon as in the afternoon, of his charming genius.—When will artists begin seriously to study, before they present themselves to be judged?—when learn, that Youth has a beauty of its own, which can be got back by neither prayers nor tears when it has once vanished?—when forbear to trade on such youth, as a quality which shall stand in stead of culture? Pauline Garcia was a ripe musician—with many natural defects bespeaking indulgence—ere she began to sing;—but Signor Mario was a Hyperion born, who had only to be seen and heard, and the enchantment was complete.

The other new appearances were beneath mediocrity. In the *ballet*, Mdlle. Fanny Elssler increased her fame by dancing in the "Gipsy"—though the presentment of that capital work seemed pale and starved, to those who had seen it at the *Grand Opera* of Paris.

THE YEAR 1840.

OPERAS.

"Il Matrimonio Segreto."—*Cimarosa.* "La Sonnambula," "Beatrice di Tenda," "Il Pirata," "I Puritani."—*Bellini.* "Torquato Tasso,"* "Lucia di Lammermoor," "L'Elisir d'Amore."—*Donizetti.* "Il Giuramento."*—*Mercadante.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "Inez di Castro."*—*Persiani.* "Otello," "La Gazza Ladra," "Il Barbiére," "La Donna del Lago."—*Rossini.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. de Varny.* Persiani. Tosi.* Ernesta Grisi. Grisi.—MM. Ricciardi.* Coletti.* Lablache. Rubini. Tamburini. Mario.

(In German Opera, at the St. James's Theatre.)—Herr Staudigl.

BALLETS.

"Ta Tarantule."*—"Le Lac des Feès."*—"La Gitana."—"L'Ombre."*

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Fanny Elssler. Cerito.* Taglioni.—M. Bretin.*

THE YEAR 1840.

In 1840 the Opera management, which for half-a-dozen years had gone on from strength to strength, began to change its plans, and to show symptoms of uneasiness, decomposition, and pretext. Since the day when Signor Costa took up the *baton*, its orchestra had steadily improved under his discipline, intelligence, and resolution to be contented with nothing short of the best. Then, the excellent company of singers, who moved from Paris to London, with the rare advantage of perfect mutual understanding one with the other, had shown in their performances an equality and finish unattainable under any other circumstances than those of habitual intercourse. It is true, that new compositions did not come forward, as in the time when Signor Rossini was pouring out his treasures, no

less fluently than, in his world, Walter Scott had done. But our public was well satisfied; and, for once in its life, knew that it was content, and asked for no immediate change.

The spell of ruin, in the shape of litigation, complicated enough to bewilder the most cunning Chancery (or Chicanery) barrister, had hung, for years on years, over the Haymarket Opera-House. Season after season had the world been wearied by reports of this or the other trial in which the property figured, as yet one more of those cases displayed by our admirable modern novelist in his "Bleak House."—It would seem to be an indispensable ingredient in operatic speculation, that it should be entered on without money, without foresight, without special knowledge, by way of sheet-anchor. —To meet the exigencies of law and debt, prices of admission were raised; the season (formerly dependant on subscription) was shortened;—and, what was least supportable, an attempt was made to replace the good artists by others less good. The result will be seen.

One of the liveliest evenings of the season of 1840 was that of the Tamburini riot, on the night when Mademoiselle Cerito was to make her first *pirouette* here. The intention of ousting this excellent artist, then in his prime, to replace him by Signor Coletti —another excellent singer (though second in order

of merit and accomplishment)—was resented with such fiery indignation as has not been often witnessed. The public would not receive the new dancer; it would demand reason for the substitution for the singer—*would* have its own favourite back again, and became violent beyond reason and propriety.—It carried its point, however, for the year: after having treated those who are amused by uproar to a performance of such disorder and discord, as must have gratified them to their hearts' content.

The Italian new compositions, one and all, failed. Signor Mercadante's "Giuramento," though containing some effective vocal music, when the same is detached, is, after all, merely a clever setting of Victor Hugo's tremendous "Angelo"—in no point of force or feeling comparable to Donizetti's "Lucrezia Borgia," though creditably written.—"Torquato Tasso" is a poor opera, which has nowhere sustained itself. Poets look badly when they are put on the stage; and when they are made to sing, it may chance that the singing does not prove poetical.—Of "Inez di Castro," a grand, violent Spanish story, which has tempted many dramatists (among others, our Miss Mitford and Leigh Hunt, —always in vain) in opera weakly set to music by Signor Persiani,—I recollect absolutely nothing;—neither *costume*, nor tune, nor any turn of incident

or of orchestra. Save for old *memoranda*, the very production of a work so effete would have been forgotten.

During this year there was, in a smaller theatre (the St. James's), a German Opera-company, which brought to light some stage-works, till then little known here — such as Weber's "Euryanthe," Spohr's "Faust" and "Jessonda," Dr. Marschner's "Templer und Judinn;"—and which revived Gluck's second "Iphigenia." The intrinsic worth of all these operas, as compositions, made itself felt, somehow; but the mediocrity of all, (except one,) of those who presented the music, did not slay the creations of the great German masters, old and young,—so much as put them to sleep. Yet the best *soprano* voice of this half century was to be heard among these German singers in Madame Stöckl Heinefetter (one of the four Heinefetter sisters);—and a strenuous tenor veteran was there in Herr Wild—a singer who had seen out many dynasties, and many composers,—but who never could have been accepted as a favourite elsewhere than in Germany.

It is heresy, I know, to dwell on the disenchantment which persons who are sensible to the charms of singing have to undergo in the course of their acquaintance with German Opera. It will be thought worse to say, that to hear many of the

masterpieces of its limited repertory, mated with German language and presented by German artists, be they ever so strenuous, is a trial only to be got through by abstracting the work itself from the vehicle of its interpretation. Yet, to me, the average German execution of German Opera—setting aside the choral portions—is as little welcome, as it would be to see one of Shakespeare's plays industriously laboured through by provincial *Romeos* and *Juliets*.—Partly, the indifference to vocal grace and beauty, which has become so universal as to be all but generic, may arise from the superior attention given since Haydn's day to purely instrumental music; but, in part, it would seem as if a sense was wanting to the people—so strangely ungracious is the rule of vocal stage-performance, in the country of such great instrumental composers.—It was least unsatisfactory at Vienna—perhaps because that capital has held on to its commerce with Southern art longer than Berlin, or Dresden, or Munich. The few most acceptable singers of later time — Madame Jenny Lutzer, Madame Van Hasselt-Barth, and Herr Staudigl—belonged to the Karnther Thör Theatre.—I can recall not one German tenor whom I have heard on the stage with much pleasure, save Herr Tichatschek, at Dresden;—nowhere a *contralto*—a voice apparently withheld from Germany, as also from France.

Of some among the above named, as they passed, I may have to speak, with reference to their appearances in Italian Opera, or Opera in Italian.—For the present, it must suffice to point out their peculiar qualities (for better for worse), as one among other reasons why German Opera has never cordially thriven in London, since the year of its first real revelation here.

Having named a few exceptions, I must dwell for a moment on the name of Staudigl, who was first heard in London in 1840.—He is, probably, the best example of a German *basso* that ever existed.—So long ago as Handel's time, managers repaired to Germany when they were in want of this particular voice. A certain Waltz, who had been the great master's cook,* figured on the London stage in Handel's operas. — There has been, from the time of Waltz downwards to that of Herr Formes, a line of Germans richly endowed with deep and ponderous organs, such as is to be found in no other country. The only very deep-toned Italian *basso* that I recollect was Signor Porto (if he was an Italian)—the only French voice of the

* Possibly, the cook to whom Handel alluded, in the *mot* which has been worked so hard to Gluck's disparagement, and in which the composer of "The Messiah" is described as having said, that the composer of "Orpheus" knew no more of counterpoint than his cook.

kind that of M. Levasseur; but the French sing in every register;—and, not having been genially endowed by Nature, manage to press every possibility and impossibility which study and stage-tact can secure for them, into the service of music and declamation.

Staudigl was a great singer—a great artist, also: a man born with a real vocation for the stage and for music.—Placed, when young, in that Paradise for lazy youths with small means, the Benedictine Monastery of Mölk, on the Danube, there was no quiet for him—no possibility of his remaining there.—Yet the quasi-monks of Mölk have liberty enough within its lazy limits.—They can go down the Danube to the Vienna theatres; they can lay by their monastic dress when they travel. When they are at home they are lodged royally. Nevertheless, it is hard to keep their number up, even in Austria;—and Staudigl broke out from thence, on the strength of a noble bass voice, compassing two octaves—from F to F—equal, rich, sonorous, in no common degree; fairly trained and subject to the prompting of a genial, careless nature, which wanted outlet for its abundance.—When he came to London, from the first, he towered above all his fellow German singers in German Opera.—There could be no question with anybody that this was a voice which belonged to a musician

of no common order, and also to a man, warm, kindly, impulsive; who threw his life and his temperament into every note that he gave out. He was not well educated, I have been told—(I never knew, nor spoke with, him)—but he had that which the French call "distinction"—that innate, cheerful, courteous self-assertion—which belongs to no rank, to no training, to no ancestry,—and which engages at once and for all those who are willing to enjoy, let them be ever so closely obliged to compare.

Among the new Italian singers, Signor Coletti must be named first, as an expressive, manly artist, with a fine baritone voice; less flexible and versatile than Signor Tamburini,—an artist of whom the public, after a few seasons, tired somewhat unjustly. He has now, for years, sung only at Rome and Naples.—Madame Tosi was a mediocre singer, who had studied good models—one of the class which can hardly be expected to exist for the future; so few and far between are the examples left in Italy worthy of imitation. Those Italians now sing the best who have had the least to do with their own stage. The reinforcements of Italian Opera have of late come from every other source than the South.—1840, then, cannot be chronicled as among the years of the Golden Age of Musical Drama in London.

It was the year, however, of the last comic *ballet* which excited any enthusiasm here. This was the "Tarantule"—incomparably acted and danced by Mademoiselle Fanny Elssler. She put forth in it all her mimic power, all that audacious and exuberant execution, which made the critic say, that if Taglioni was "the Poetry," she was "the Wit," of motion.—The story could not be matched for absurdity—being the tale of a girl who pretends to be Tarantula-*mad*, in order that she may dance a stupid old suitor forced on her into declining her hand; but, absurd as it is, as canvas for Mademoiselle Elssler's embroideries, it could hardly be surpassed in comedy. The manner in which she wrought its whimsical scenes up to a climax; the grace, the daring, the incessant brilliancy, the feverish buoyancy, and the sly humour with which she managed to let the public into her secret that her madness was only feigned—raised this ridiculous farce to the level of a work of art.—No one, probably, will attempt to revive it, since the silver age of *ballet* was already beginning to set in, even before Mademoiselle Fanny Elssler's departure. Not long after this creation — the last of her comic ones—was exhibited, this fascinating artist was bitten by that Tarantula desire to roam, on the temptation of fabulous gains, which has done so much to bring about the downfal of our theatres;—and virtually

gave up Paris and London to undertake the voyage to America, concerning which so much was written at the time.—Our relatives on the other side of the water were then almost as deliriously transported by the seductions of the dancer, as they proved themselves to be, a few years later, by the munificent charities and lovely singing of Mademoiselle Jenny Lind. In Mademoiselle Fanny Elssler's case there was no pretence, even, of extraordinary virtue.—That she was graceful and fascinating in her manners, everyone can bear witness who met her in private. The most prudish woman —or man—might have passed days in her society, without being recalled to any recollection of the scanty stage dress, and the attitudes, fitter for sculpture than for social life—in short, by any look, gesture, or allusion, belonging to the dancer's craft, on her part. She spoke and behaved in private with the ease, quietness, and taste of a gentlewoman; but this could only be known to a few, whereas her *pirouettes* and *battemens*, and the whole artillery of her sorceries, were, without stint, public property.—And on the hint of the sorcery, the States, Puritan and Catholic—rigid Boston and hot New Orleans—were up in arms. She was caressed and courted, as Lions can be caressed and courted only on the other side of the Atlantic. Divines offered her their pews in meeting-houses. Students from every country under

the sun serenaded her; her lap was filled with gold with a prodigality recalling those reckless times when noblemen flung purses, with diamonds among the coin, to the Sallé, or Guimard, of the hour, when she took her benefit at the Paris Opera. It was a grotesque rehearsal, in short, of the more stately and orthodox pageant of enthusiastic belief and rapture which, a few years later, was to be enacted —with Mr. Barnum for High-Priest—in honour of the real claims (howsoever by artful circumstance exaggerated) of the greatest singer whom Sweden has ever sent forth to captivate the world.

How strange it seems, already, to draw into light these old slides of the Magic Lantern,—to recollect the keen and eager interest, the fierce controversy, the fabulous rumours, the sonnets, the gifts, the plaudits which all but tore down the theatre! How strange to speak of the Elssler fever, as gone for ever!—of the Lind fever, as in suspense—if ever to be revived, who can tell? With this strangeness there is some sadness.—A great period is over; and those who are the most willing to accept and to recognize everything which is great and individual (come from what quarter of the globe it will), do not find any new sensations in the old haunts of their pleasure. They must go elsewhere, if they cannot rest content on their recollections.

THE YEAR 1841.

OPERAS.

"Beatrice di Tenda," "Norma," "La Straniera."—*Bellini.* "Gli Orazi," "Il Matrimonio."—*Cimarosa.* "Lucia," "Fausta,"* "Roberti Devereux,"* "Marino Faliero," "Lucrezia Borgia."—*Donizetti.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "Il Tancredi," "Semiramide," "La Cenerentola," "Il Barbiére," "Il Turco."—*Rossini.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Viardot-Garcia. Nunn. Persiani. Granchi. Löwe.* Grisi.—MM. Mario. Flavio.* De Bassini. Tamburini. Rubini. Lablache.

BALLETS.

"Le Diable Amoureux."*—"La Sylphide."—"La Gitana."—"La Magie Amoureuse."

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Guy Stephan.* Cerito. Taglioni.—M. Albert.*

FRENCH TRAGEDY.

Mademoiselle Rachel Felix.

THE YEAR 1841.

NEITHER of Donizetti's new operas had any success. Not a bar of "Fausta" lives; and only a song and a duett from "Roberto Devereux" are remembered. *Queen Elizabeth* has never been fortunate as an opera heroine: neither (by-the-way) has been *Mary Stuart.*

It was a matter of no common interest to be allowed to hear Cimarosa's "Gli Orazi," though the tragedy was only executed "after a fashion." But the hearing of the opera—when due allowance was afforded for all drawbacks—revealed the vast change which had passed over musical Drama, since that operatic setting of Corneille's play had been written. The music—the final duett excepted—seemed, on its revival, pleasing, but feeble beyond the power of acting to animate; telling of a time when the pleasure of the ear was cared for on the Opera-stage, without any close reference to

dramatic truth or dignity. The old heroes and heroines stepped the boards rather than presented characters. Lord Mount-Edgecumbe recollects how the Gabriellì, (in her day more talked of than Mademoiselle Lind), "tucked up her hoop," as *Dido*, ere she sidled into the flames of Carthage.—Even Malibran's sister, full of young dramatic fervour, could do nothing for the heroine, as draped by Cimarosa, analogous to that which Rachel did, when she electrified all Paris in the revival of the formal "Les Horaces" of Corneille. "Gli Orazi" is a weak opera—let it be taken how it will.

Yet, that Cimarosa was not, of necessity, dramatically weak, is to be seen in that scene from his Oratorio, "Il Sacrifizio d'Abramo," "*Deh parlate*," which will always tempt Italian singers of the highest class.—The dispensation under which he wrote, was one (as every musical stage dispensation has been — save, possibly, in France) in which a single interest was allowed to predominate;—technical, sensual, musical pleasure, over deep emotion—the singing-master's art over the temptation to the tragedian to express any or every deep emotion. — The pendulum has now oscillated to its furthest extreme.

A criticism somewhat analogous could be passed on the once-famed "Tancredi" of Cimarosa's suc-

cessor—which was also revived this year—and with singers no less able than Madame Persiani and Madame Viardot.—The latter, it is true, had to fight up against recollections of Madame Pasta, as *Tancredi;* but the music, in spite of Signor Rossini's vivacity, and fluency of melody (how superior both to Cimarosa's!)—in spite of the vocal magnificence and charm of the duetts—came over the ear as something behind our time—because it had never been wholly consistent with its purpose. "Il Tancredi" is already old, with being ancient. —Gluck's operas are ancient, without being old.

Signor Rossini's "Il Turco" was, likewise, tried again—an opera containing some of its writer's most exquisite and spontaneous comic music—in which, again, Cimarosa is utterly beaten on his own ground. On this work that Archimage of Comedy, Lablache, lavished his best drollery and most superb singing.—But the world had got past "Il Turco;"—owing to the puerile stupidity of the story; and it is too probable that the opera is buried "for ever and a day," owing to the thoughtless disregard of the man of genius who flung it out.

There were no new artists this year who could gain, or ought to have gained, favour in London, at our Italian Opera. With regard to one of the ladies, English curiosity had been excited, and not

without reason. On my first visit to Germany in 1839,* every *table d'hôte* was ringing (and loudly tables *do* ring with talk there!) with enthusiasm for a charming singer then to be heard at Berlin—a Sontag come back again;—yes!—and better than Sontag!—When their enthusiasm is aroused, our "cousins German" do not spare asseveration.—I was to hear Mademoiselle Löwe at Berlin—or else I had heard nothing!—I *did* hear her.—With my London and Paris remembrances fresh in my mind—and hearing her only in translated French and Italian operas, I was colder in acquiescence than my hospitable hosts liked.—I saw in her a tall, handsome woman, somewhat of the type of Mademoiselle Fanny Elssler, and of a more modern *prima donna*, Mademoiselle Cruvelli; who looked intelligent, was dressed with taste, and acted with an animated attempt at the French style of stage eloquence;—obviously a lady to be set apart from the list of average German songstresses.—But I could not like Mademoiselle Löwe's voice: a weak, wiry, high *soprano*, without charm; and I could not close my ears to the fact that she belonged to the class of vocalists who think they are florid, and who do their best accordingly—but who are not really so—how different from the Sontags, Cintis, Persianis, with whom, for the instant, their admirers class

* "Modern German Music," by H. F. Chorley.

them! Trying at the most audacious feats of execution as she did, Mademoiselle Löwe achieved no success. Everything, however well-aimed, fell short of its mark; and, insomuch as the ornate and florid style of singing is to be defended, on every principle of Art,—the plated ware in place of the real precious metal—the mechanical web-work in place of the delicate *hand*-lace—cannot content those who would rather have plain and massive simplicity than false ornament.—Great was the Berlin sarcasm which a stranger, compelled to speak (silence being mistaken for accusation), had to bear, if he offered comparisons such as these.—"No! If the Löwe were to come to London, I should see!—Everybody knew" (this in 1839) "that Grisi's voice was gone.—Everybody knew that there was no singer in Europe like the Löwe!"

Such enthusiasm naturally made its object believe in herself somewhat immoderately.—It came into Mademoiselle Löwe's mind to leave Berlin (even as Sontag had done) for brilliant Paris, and for stupid, but well-paying England. She was absolutely (I have been told) after quitting her own subjects for new conquests, appealed to at the frontier by an offer of recall sent after her, entreating her to return, at an enormous increase of salary.—She was deaf—would go on; and, con-

fident in what her subjects had encouraged her to believe, would measure herself against "*those* Italians!"—In Paris, she was unable to find an engagement—but in London, a less costly Grisi was, possibly, at that juncture an object of importance to a management in which second-rate artists were, on principle, preferred;—and so, to London Mademoiselle Löwe came; and so it was whispered east, and asserted west, before she came, that this real idol of the Berlin public (as Sontag had been before her) was better than Grisi—even as the Germans had said.

The lady herself I conceive to have been thoroughly self-deceived. When she tried to mount her throne here, in "La Straniera" (an unlucky opera) of Bellini, every one characteristic and quality of those I have mentioned came to full light and fair appreciation.—She was not allowed to consider herself a failure; but the truth could not be long escaped from.

And here I must tell that, for a past season or two, the foreign system had been introduced of fabricated applause, in the determination to force on the public what and whomsoever the Opera-manager adopted. Men and women,—as notoriously hired for such mystification as the howlers at an Irish funeral,—began to be seen in known places every night, obtruding their stationary raptures,

which were paid for, at the serviceable times and places. The extent to which this nuisance grew was one among other causes of the decay of the old Italian Opera, and its increasing dis-esteem in the judgment of all real connoisseurs.—The English are in some things supine—too slow to believe in the existence and practice of trickery; but an impression once made on them, is made for ever.—The poor artists, deluded and degraded by such false shows, run a risk of faring badly when the hour of disenchantment arrives.

For a night or two, Mademoiselle Löwe may have dreamed that the succession to Madame Grisi was to be hers. Ere a week or two had gone, she must have felt that she was to be either a substitute, or a "second woman," in London.—In the latter capacity she might have become very valuable.

She was the best *Donna Elvira* in "Don Giovanni," that I have ever seen—assuming the dignified, half-devotee post of that ill-used, and rather troublesome woman, to perfection. — She sang the music conscientiously, and the *harpsichord* quality of her voice told well, rather than ill, for the opera —the *quill*-tone in it (musicians will understand my word) giving a sort of fantastic excuse for the *Don's* vicious vagaries in favour of something sweeter. Later in the year, as *La Dogaressa*, in

"Marino Faliero," (revived with a vain hope of settling that fine opera on the stage), her demeanour as the Venetian patrician lady was unimpeachable—and her dress superb and pictorial. Could these accessories save a weak and ungracious female part in an opera, they would have done so in her case.—Later, Mademoiselle Löwe was accepted in Italy, during the season of Opera dearth, even then setting in.—A little later still, she left the stage (it was said) for a great marriage.—She was a graceful, accomplished woman, with much tact; never a great artist—but one of the least disagreeable German singers who have adventured on the Italian Opera stage in this country.

Of the other new vocalists in the year 1841 there is no need to speak.—This was the last season, for many years, of Madame Viardot's performances. When she returned, it was to a world entirely transformed, and with her own peculiar genius in its own peculiar place.—Yet, even so early in her career as her singing in "La Cenerentola" could not be exceeded for invention and brilliancy of style. When she appeared with Rubini, she had to subdue her voice so as to match his musical whisper; but, for the *final rondo*, she had already invented that reading, and those admirably ingenious changes, (changes not so much allowed as demanded by Signor Rossini's music), most of which

have since been quietly appropriated by less imaginative singers:—to name but one—Madame Alboni. During this season Signor Mario stepped into the place of first tenor—never since vacated by him.—Musically, however, the year, as concerned Italian Opera, was not rich.

There was a German company at another theatre, of which the only endurable member was Staudigl.—A stinted and slovenly version of M. Meyerbeer's "Robert" failed to bring that romantic and difficult work into fashion.—To this day, London has been obdurate in disregard of it. Something worse happened in respect to another opera, which, were it duly presented, has every quality recommending it to English admiration.

This is Mozart's "Die Eutführung"—one of the most delicious comic operas in being—Mozart's *only* comic opera—for his "Figaro" is sentimental, in the teeth of Beaumarchais' situations; and his "Cosi fan tutte" is as grand in style as "Don Juan"—wheresoever the stupidity of the story could be thrown off by the composer.—The local colour and clear distinction of character in "Die Eutführung" were never subsequently outdone by the composer. It has fun for the thoughtless—construction for those who will not accept an opera "without counterpoint"—a flow of melody belonging to the opening days of its owner's well-spring,

in no later work enriched—and amplest opportunity for vocal display given to the highest of *soprani*, to the lowest of *bassi*, to the most luscious of tenors, to the shrewdest of *soubrettes*. Here, except by Staudigl, it was simply disguised and murdered by Mozart's countrymen, and therefore undervalued and overlooked. Its recent disinterment in Paris, at the *Theatre Lyrique*, with the changes and retrenchments in the opera-book — rendered indispensable by the taste of our times— may lead to its being replaced in the theatre by such lively persons as can sing no less than act— if it should prove that the humour for Comic Opera has not died out, past revival.

RACHEL FELIX.

HERE an episode must be permitted, to record the sensation produced at our Italian Opera House, by a great European artist—though the artist was not a singer.

This artist was Rachel Felix, who appeared in England in 1841—as a necessary consequence of her glorious revival in Paris of classical French tragedy. Often as the story of this singular woman's life has been told—often as has the peculiar form of her genius been discussed—the subject is not yet exhausted.—Her fame, in the excess to which it was raised during her life-time, was, even in her life-time, a contested one—is still more so now, when the sorcery which she exercised over so many of the ablest men and women in Europe is withdrawn—and when they are more free to reflect than they could be while they were subject to it.

Everyone knows the parentage of the Jew ped-

lar's child;—the pinching misery of her early vagabond life—a misery which withered her frame, and may have withered the heart within it. She could not choose but inherit a bitter, rebellious spirit;—flung as she was into the kennel, to find the means of providing herself with the penurious meal, and the shabby, threadbare clothing,—and born with the burning consciousness that she owned powers which starvation and delay might utterly destroy. "Ah!" she said, in the last moments of her feverish life, when eager friends scoured the country to cater for the dying woman bread fine enough to tempt her diseased palate—"Ah! if only some one had given me a little of this when I was young!"—There are few men who can resist the training of misery, without being spoiled in part—still fewer women. Rachel was not of these very few.—She had instincts, moreover, for that career in life, the drawback of which is, that it encourages every vanity, and developes every appetite.—When what she became is admitted, what she had been must never be forgotten. Small chances were there, that a child so denied wholesome nurture of mind and body, should, under prosperity, grow up to be anything but what she grew up to be—a grasping, sensual, selfish, false woman.

There is no need to recount how the girl, after many a weary step of hope deferred, arrived at the

Théâtre Français—how, on a hot summer night, when that theatre was emptied of all except loungers who had nothing better to do, she struck, by her earnestness, her declamatory power, her originality of attitude,—the key-note of that success which never failed her, so long as the life and spirits lasted which she tore into fragments by her cupidity and ambition.—Ere a month was out, the name of the thin, severe-looking girl, who had galvanized the old, formal, rhymed tragedy of France into a new life, was in the mouth of most people who care for plays in France.—The wonder of the feat struck every one, just as much as if there had not been involved in it some recoil from the romantic tragedies which, under even the hands of so consummate a master of the stage as M. Victor Hugo, had begun to weary the world by their frantic violence.—Coming after "Angelo" and "Les Burggraves," "Andromaque" and "Les Horaces" were somewhat of a relief.—Then, this strange foreign-looking girl had a certain sinister charm, which could fascinate.—It was to be felt that her might was that of a troubled spirit.—Suffering was in her face, and pride; and concentrated thought, and scorn, beside. Her eye, though small, gleamed; her sharply-cut lips opened with that decision which physiognomists appreciate. "If there be weakness," said a keen observer, "seek for it in the mouth."—The voice from between the

lips was hollow, sometimes husky, and with no large variety of tones; but it made itself heard, whether in a whisper, or in a burst of passion at its climax.—Her declamation was (in her early years, especially) admirable.—Some objected that it was not the traditional, ancient, academical French, such as Clairon and Le Kain are reputed to have uttered. Modern ears found it excellent; because, while every cadence was respected, the old chant of the rhymed *tirades* was broken up, so as to make them sound natural.—And so she was sought for and caressed—and became the rage of the great ladies of the *Faubourg*—staunch opponents of all modern revolutions—staunch upholders of the dull Drama of the good old times.—She satisfied them in private by a haughty, reserved, yet not insolent demeanour—by an absence of awkwardness, under patronage so new to her; and by a quickness of repartee—not flippant, but intellectually ready. —Never did a new stage Queen present herself in private life with such instinctive tact as she.

When our own Siddons had got free from her obscurity, and had possessed herself of London,—as Rachel possessed herself of Paris society,—the world of Wits voted her heavy and tragical. Mrs. Thrale said, "Why, this is a leaden goddess that we have been worshipping." Sydney Smith could remember that she used "to stab the potatoes."

Nothing in Rachel's career is more remarkable than the manner in which, after having been once called out, she seemed equal to any social position in which she might be placed, whatever the blaze of light over it—whatever the *aroma* of sanctity round it.—If she laughed in her sleeve at the homages paid to her, it was with the silent laughter of irony; and with some set purpose (it may be) of leading a life behind the scenes both of the stage and of the world—such as might recompense herself for the pressure of the tragic mask, in the one; and, in the other, for the bandying of compliments and courtesies with those whose curiosity must have been felt by her as acutely as their advances.

By-and-by Rachel began to tire of her grandeur. Nor could it be hidden, that she exchanged social consideration for another life—not one of comradeship with artists—so much as of passion and indulgence. That the *Melpomene* of the stage and of courtly drawing-rooms, could be a far less dignified character behind the curtain of private life, oozed out—even as the miserable circumstances of her childhood had done. Her grand, reserved manner, snatched up as a dress, could be flung down by her as such at any moment. She had wearied (and who can wonder?) of the faded honours of erudite society—for a year so flattering;—

and, once firmly installed in her stage-throne, thenceforth resolved to please herself, and to make others pay for her p'easure.—Her family affection was the one true incitement which may have kept her art alive, in the midst of a headstrong and headlong career.

These things may have explained the style of her acting, and (for some of us) the defects of it.—It became forced and untruthful in proportion as she became eager for gain and careless of good repute.

She appeared in London in the morning of her glory, and took our world with amazement at once. Her supporters were wretched. One, a M. Francisque, who had been promoted from a rubbishy melodrama, "Le Sonneur de St. Paul," to play Greek heroism and Roman virtue with her, was (I remember) on the spot denounced, by a wit and a great actress, as behaving "like a wild windmill." Her *confidante* was dreary and unsightly, in common degree, to say the least of it.—But at once, and from the first, she became the fashion here. There might be something of imitation in this—inasmuch as many among our best and most cultivated public have been always caught by the Parisian mode — but more was due to her own haughty power, which spoke as the power of one who would — and who accordingly did — control her audiences.

She came again and again;—and on each coming seemed to stamp the first impression made by her deeper on her English subjects. Yet, it could not be concealed that her first great effects were repeated, almost mechanically—that, when she tried to vary them, she went astray from truth. I had followed her performances closely in Paris, ere she appeared here, with as much wonder as pleasure. Perhaps I cannot better record my own first impressions, than by presenting them as they came to me on the spot in 1840 :—

RACHEL AS CAMILLE.

Never was flame so searching and so keen
  In such a frail and pallid cresset shrined;
  Never was spirit—fiercer than the wind
That, from the ripe volcano's clefts, is seen
Forth-issuing, red with doom—with such a mien
  Of girlish youth and feebleness entwined.—
  Do some dark memories ever haunt thy mind?—
Who might be orphan of some luckless Queen
  Tortured to weary death before thy face—
Have learnt thy earliest thoughts of sky and flower
  In the dank bounds of prison burial-place.—
Or, Muse of Israel! had thy birthright power
With bitter spell to rule Life's opening hour,
  And give the Sybil's scorn to Innocence and Grace?

From the first hour when I saw and wondered at Rachel's marvellous genius, to the last—when it became obvious that she had postponed ambition to

effect, in all she did—I was never so moved as to surrender myself to her influence. She never made me tremble or weep, nor forget my own notions of right and wrong in stage personation. For myself—though, later, others were moved to hysterics by the wonderful elaboration of her *Phedre*—her best performance was that of the wicked *Roxana*, in Racine's "Bajazet."—The force, the concentrated venom, the torture of passion avenging itself by torturing others, which lie in the conception of the character, were thrust by her into the words of Maintenon's favourite dramatist. In "Bajazet" one did not see Racine, but Rachel. Her dress was superb. She had girt herself with all the wicked allurements of the East, and her face seemed to lower and to flash out from beneath her jewelled turban, and above her magnificent cymar, with a deadly, basilisk beauty. Her "*Sortez*"—to the man for whom the bow-string waits at the door, had, in her voice and look, a terror which owed nothing to imagination.

In other of her personations of the heroines of old French Tragedy, all-subduing as they were, there might be as much of false as of true. For instance, in the "Polyeucte" of Cornèille, where the reclaimed Pagan exclaims, at last, "*Je crois!*"—there was, with Rachel, a triumphant violence, in the blazing eyes, and streaming hair, and awful

voice, with which she burst on the stage—more rage, in short, than belief in her conversion;—but the stage point was made thereby.—Her want of womanly tenderness was no less to be felt;—save in one play, and this almost the least popular drama in which she appeared—the "Diane" of M. Emile Augier. Wherefore this play was here passed by—the story of a sister and a brother, the one protecting, the other passionate—I have never been able to understand, save on the hypothesis, that Love is a *sine quâ non* for the enthralment of a modern audience. This "Diane" is a story of affection and self-sacrifice. In it, Rachel was warm, yielding, quiet, yet bold as a lioness when the time of self-assertion came, to protect the honour of her weaker brother. But the play had no success either here or in Paris—neither her playing in it.

When classical Tragedy was worn out, Rachel was obliged to have recourse to revivals of romantic Drama—to new concoctions (the above among the number). Her *Mademoiselle de Belleisle* could not efface the recollection of Mars, for whom the part was written, after Mars had passed middle age.—There was a double part concocted for her, as *Valeria* and *Lysiscka*, in a trumpery tragedy, made to prove that *Messalina* had been belied, and that, owing to a resemblance of face, a chaste matron and a courtezan could be confounded one with the

other.—Miserable work!—The submission to such a task (it was commissioned for her) must have shown how far advanced was the actress on her downward road—how willing she was to endure any shame in art, for the sake of shame's repayment. In her *Lysiscka*, the whole real nature of Rachel seemed to break loose, without stint or bridle. She was the bacchanal, the courtezan, the lover of a low mime—but always with "a form," as *Lady Blarney* put it. That worse half-part in the monstrous play was acted to the life by her. So, again, did she seem to find a congenial occupation in "Lady Tartuffe," Madame de Girardin's play—hideous as having been written by a woman, for a woman to act.

Without question, the most popular of Rachel's new creations was *Adrienne Lecouvreur*. It was, perhaps, her most complex and effective one, but, from first to last, unreal. There was in it a certain cold bitterness, belonging, possibly, to the nature of the actress,—and which came into increasing prominence, as lines in the face do, with age,—at variance with the character described. More than once, again, to ensure a point, Rachel falsified the situation—as for instance, in the closet-scene, where she meets her rival, whom she protects. The Princess, infuriate with jealousy at finding an unknown woman in possession of the field, cries, "*Ah! je vais me venger!*" The actress, who is

providing for her rival's escape from an equivocal position, has to say, "*Mais, je vous protége,*" by way of closing the scene. Rachel could not afford the scene to close without a thunderbolt;—and accordingly, instead of the sad, surprised tone which the words demand, delivered them with the predominating vehemence and the warning finger of one launching forth a curse.

I could multiply instances by the hundred in illustration of the peculiarities of this great actress. But who that ever saw Rachel, and bent beneath her strong, intellectual genius—who that remembers how she was crowned and heralded, and believed in by those who could not understand her, yet who loved to believe—who that enjoys Art, though not willing to surrender judgment and power of comparison—who that cannot forget early difficulties, which have warped, soured, set wrong the artist with his calling and his life—can look at the end of Rachel's career without a deep and grave melancholy?—That her restlessness, cupidity, and family affection, practised on (perhaps unwittingly) by those about her, rent her to death, is true. There was not money enough to be got in the Old World—she must grasp it by handfuls in the New one. Her exactions had wearied the theatre in which she had made her first success, and in which she should have dwelt—and died—among her own

people—as at home.—She had distanced authors, willing to minister to her on their knees, by her caprices.—She cannot have been happy in her private life. That for which she had laid by social consideration may have began to pall on her. With all women, let them have been ever so reckless, there comes a time, when the desire to be forgiven —to be at peace among quiet and untainted women—will make its way. She was beginning to feel the weariness of her profession, with years of life to come; supposing herself left, or driven from it.

And so, she lent herself to that American tour —a sequel to those of Mdlle. Elssler and Mdlle. Lind — by which the European favourite then hoped to gather such gains as do not grow here, among a people less excitably curious. And, when the scabbard was all but worn out, she resolved to cut her way into a gold mine by the sword of her genius, sharpened by restlessness of private uneasiness, perhaps—who knows?—by some thought that a life otherwise begun and continued might have ended better.—She was worn out ere she went to America. They wore her out further there:—They compelled her, on the stage, to sing "La Marseillaise," because she had consented to sing it in Paris in 1848, by way of propitiating the Red Republicans. She was hunted, oppressed—from within by her

own failing physical powers, by her own cupidity—from without by a public, who could only give her a stare where she had been used to command sympathy.—How she paid for her vagabond fancy with her life; how she came home to perish—and then to have a grand funeral—and afterwards a great auction of the goods in her house, pried into by the great ladies, (some among them her former patronesses,) who marvelled to find St. Veronica kerchiefs, and authentic rosaries, in the room of one who had never quitted the faith of her fathers—are facts which have been told again and again in newspaper paragraphs;—sad, dreary facts, indeed, it seems to me. Such a childhood, such a youth, such a life, such a decease—all connected—each, separately, false and dislocated—make a story from which it would be pleasant to have escaped, (be the triumphs of the lost artist ever so glorious), were it not better, for the happiness of artists to come (who may be as triumphant and glorious), that it should be told, in no bitterness, but with no reserve.

THE YEAR 1842.

OPERAS.

"Norma," "Beatrice di Tenda," "I Puritani."—*Bellini.* "Malek Adhel."—*Costa.* "Gemma di Vergy,"* "Lucia," "Torquato Tasso," "Lucrezia Borgia," "Anna Bolena." — *Donizetti.* "Le Cantatrice Villane"* — *Fioravanti.* "Elena da Feltre."* — *Mercadante.* "Don Giovanni," "Cosi fan tutte."—*Mozart.* "Il Barbiére,"—*Rossini.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Molteni.* Persiani. Frezzolini.* Ronconi.* — MM. Guasco.* Ronconi.* Poggi.* Rubini. Lablache. F. Lablache. Stella.*

BALLETS.

"Giselle."* "Alma."*

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Carlotta Grisi.* Cerito.—M. Perrot.

THE YEAR 1842.

THIS was a bad and disappointing season, marked with little novelty worth commemorating.—Donizetti's "Gemma di Vergy," and Signor Mercadante's "Elena da Feltre," were new to our Italian stage. Neither produced the slightest sensation. The latter had been more fortunate in an English dress, owing to the remarkable acting and singing of Miss Adelaide Kemble.

And here, seeing that a young English lady, in spite of the disadvantages of a translated version, and of comrades unused to Italian music, could gain a success for an unknown opera in London—which an Italian *prima donna*, in all the plenitude of promise and power—I mean Madame Frezzolini—was unable to do—a word or two are not misplaced, in a chronicle of great singers, regarding another great interpreter.

Such was Miss Adelaide Kemble: a musical artist in right of resolution, rather than liberal nature. Her voice, originally limited, had been moulded, rendered flexible, and extended in compass, by study and incessant practice, till it became capable of every inflexion, of every possible brilliancy.—More honest singing than its owner's I have never heard,—add to this, command of four languages and four styles of music, and poetical aspiration borne out by intellectual culture, by habitual commerce with all that is most refined and most thoughtful;—and the result could only be what it was—the greatest English singer (though not the best of this century), a poetical and thoughtful artist, whose name will never be lost so long as the art of dramatic singing is spoken of.—That Miss Kemble's singing had, always, the heaviness of style belonging to one who has had to wrestle with rebellious natural means—belonging, also, to one too full of intelligence to allow the smallest point or particle to pass without its being wrought out—is true.—She was too fond of drawing out those high notes, to gain which had cost her so dear; of delivering every syllable in every word spoken, with equal emphasis, so that a certain fatigue of impression could not but be the result.—But these mannerisms (which might have worn off) had nothing to do with the genius, skill, and

knowledge of their possessor; since these (with her instinctive and inherited powers of acting) enabled her here to carry Signor Mercadante's opera triumphantly through in its English version;* while, on our Italian stage, it died out, without disapproval,—there to be heard of no more.

How pretty was Fioravanti's comic opera! But the showy *terzett*, "*Io diro*," is the only musical piece by which even the name of "Le Cantatrice Villane" will be recollected. We have grown graver, morally (if not musically)—Italians and English both—since the days when farces of this quality sufficed for the contentment of the public.

A proof more emphatic still was to be seen, in the want of success for Mozart's "Cosi fan tutte," when that opera—silly in story, rich in beauty and skill, was revived. As regards mere attraction for the ear, Mozart never outdid the first act; so full is it of grace, harmony, constructive power, and

* Nor must it be forgotten, that Miss Kemble's *Norma* could be compared with that of Madame Pasta,—could be preferred (apart from comparisons of voice and person) to that of Madame Grisi. In comedy, too, how charming were her *Susanna* and her *Carolina!*—good enough for any Opera-house in Europe, no matter how high the standard, how famous the play-fellows of the *prima donna*. On the English stage, she created and sustained a reputation as a first-class artist, the early termination of whose career left a void, which there is small chance of our seeing filled.

that melody which was like an instinct with that wondrously-endowed artist. The concerted music is marvellous in its beauty and ingenuity. In the second act there are some superb songs—there is a magnificent close to the opera.—Yet, what do they avail? The tiresome folly of the fable is even more fatal here than in the case of "Die Zauberflöte." The utterly stupid trick put on two girls by their two lovers, abetted by a nimble Abigail, cannot pass at this time of day;—and thus, because of utter indifference on the composer's part, a mine of treasure is, as it were, drowned for ever and for ever. There is no hope for "Cosi fan tutte" on the stage as the work stands.

It was very well given, though, on this occasion,—and Rubini's singing of "*Un' aura amorosa*" is not to be forgotten, as one of the most caressing, highly-finished, and exquisite specimens of Rubini's singing.

During the eclipse of Madame Grisi,—who did not sing in London this spring—Madame Frezzolini, as the idol of Italy during that time, was naturally sought for.—How and why this elegant, tall woman, born with a lovely voice, and bred into great vocal skill (of a certain order), failed to make any impression here, are questions not to be settled easily.—She was the first who arrived of the "young Italians"—of those, I mean, who fancy that driving

the voice to its extremities can stand in the stead of passion;—and, at the time of her arrival, we were unused in England to such force and falsity of effect. But Madame Frezzolini was, nevertheless, a real singer; and her art stood her in stead for some years after Nature broke down, prematurely, —possibly owing to the strain put on its every gift and capacity. When she had left her scarce a note of her rich and real *soprano* voice to scream with, Madame Frezzolini was still charming;—and her Indian summer was found better than her spring—so far, at least, as Parisian admiration is concerned.—In London she never took root.

The two new tenors, Signor Poggi and Guasco, were both mediocre singers—though the former enjoyed a certain reputation in Italy; aided, moreover, by a reputation for gallantry.—Here, if such spurious triumphs there were, they passed unnoticed.

Among the musical events of the year 1843, the production of Signor Rossini's "Stabat" must not be forgotten.—There was the usual amount of cavil, of course, concerning it, by the would-be wise persons who will only recognize one style of music; —and who forget that, ever since the days when Opera separated itself from miracle-play, and the orchestra was allowed its place in the Church, that which is rich and florid has always been permitted to enter there. Signor Rossini's "Stabat," as con-

sidered in reference to its epoch, is no more trivial and secular than was Pergolesi's—about which such shallow musical critics as Mr. Rogers used to shake their heads and sigh, simply because it was old—and because no one could quote it against the new music—themselves, probably, the least able of the party;—no more trivial and secular than Jomelli's "Requiem,"—less so than Haydn's and Mozart's Masses.—The fugue at the end is bad; but not worse (as I am dealing with comparisons) than Spohr's fugues.—The introduction, how admirable, serious, and mournful!—the close of "*Cujus animam*"—the entire "*Pro Peccatis*"—the duett for female voices (with its prelude, incomparable in the contrast of instruments)—the opening and close of the unaccompanied chorus, "*Eià mater*"—the episodes in the quartett—the entire *contralto* song (how admirable as an example of broken rhythm!)—the gorgeous "*Inflammatus*"—the "*Paradisi gloria*"—are all so many passages—inspirations, I will say—to recall which makes the blood run quicker in one's veins, let the cavillers complain as they please.—The work stands, and should, and will stand—if not a model to composers, a delight to singers; a work which bears as little trace of manner or period, as do the best passages in "Moise," or the incomparable second act of "Guillaume Tell."

This year there was, again, at another theatre—a German company, headed by the best brilliant German singer I have ever heard (Sontag and Mdlle. Lind not coming into the category). This was Mdlle. Jenny Lutzer. It would not be easy to accomplish more, or to execute what was undertaken more perfectly, than she did. Her voice, too, had a clear, ringing tone, which lent itself well to the style chosen by her. There was a want, however, of charm—a sort of hardness of manner—in her performance and execution, which stood between her and the highest honours.—The company of which she formed one—together with Madame Stöckl Heinefetter and Herr Staudigl—attempted M. Meyerbeer's "Les Huguenots," in German. But the day of that magnificent opera had not yet come for England; and indeed, when given with German text, it loses effect to a degree which is hardly explicable. Then, the utmost care and luxury must be expended on its production, or the work becomes heavy and tiring, and its effect chill.—This, a company of strangers, who were only here for a few weeks, and in a theatre of insufficient resources, could not afford;—and "Les Huguenots," accordingly, was overlooked and judged; and people who had not seen the opera in Paris, found it in no respect remarkable, nor worthy of its reputation.—How often has the same story to be told!

There remains but one more event of this poor year to be mentioned—the arrival of Mademoiselle Carlotta Grisi.—This dancer is the only one, since Mdlles. Taglioni and Fanny Elssler, who exhibited something like individuality as compared with imitation, or repetition of known effects.—She had not the dancer's face, with its set smile put on to disguise breathless distress and fatigue;—but she looked shy, and young, and delicate, and fresh.—There was something of the briar-rose in her beauty. How she came to dance, always puzzled me; then, too, she had a sweet, little, singing voice, which, for want of outlet and enrichment, perished, next to unknown.—"Giselle" was written for her, on an invention of Heine's, by Adolphe Adam.—This lively, facile, French musician, too much undervalued—happiest in his *ballet* music—was never happier, even in his "Fille du Danube," than in "Giselle."—Some of the melodies in it are excellent, —the dance tunes are full of life; the instrumentation, if somewhat coarse, is sparkling and provocative (a first requisite in dance-music).—In short, "Giselle" was a charming *ballet*, even before Mdlle. Fanny Elssler came, who turned the romantic and gently melancholy story into a piece of tragic pathos, as powerful as was ever exhibited by mime.

The music to "Alma" was by Signor Costa—his last, and his best *ballet* music.

THE YEAR 1843.

OPERAS.

"La Sonnambula," "Norma," "I Puritani."—*Bellini.* "Adelia,"* "Belisario," "Linda di Chamouni,"* "Don Pasquale."—*Donizetti.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "Semiramide," "Il Barbiére," "La Gazza Ladra," "Guillaume Tell."—*Rossini.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Persiani. Molteni. Grisi. Brambilla. — MM. Conti.* Fornasari. Mario. Lablache. F. Lablache.

BALLETS.

"La Tarantule." "Giselle." "Ondine." "Alma." "Le Delire d'un Peintre."

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Fanny Elssler. Dumilatre.* Cerito. — MM. St Leon. Perrot.

THE YEAR 1843.

As regarded music, the Italian season of 1843 was dry and unsatisfactory.—The Opera-houses had come to an absolute dependance on Donizetti for novelties—the star of Signor Verdi not yet having risen on this side of the Alps. His name had reached England by the agency of an Englishwoman—Mrs. Alfred Shaw—who had made her first appearance on the stage, in Italy, in his "Oberto" (I think his first opera), and whose letters home spoke of the *maestro* as a composer of promise;* but, for the hour, there was no one to

* Here I cannot resist a passing word in commemoration of the excellent English vocalist named. Mrs. A. Shaw—born Miss Postans—raised the female *contralto* voice to a place and an importance which before her time it had never held in this country.—Her voice was indeed lovely, rich, equal—delivered with a graceful serenity, distinct from coldness, which was most attractive.—Her pronunciation of English was the best and most refined in my recollection.—Every

be heard, excepting Donizetti. He was then near the end of his creations—since, shortly after "Don Pasquale" was produced, his mind gave way (as has been told), and his life of incessant brain and fancy, and bodily indulgence, came to its painful solution in imbecility, and, not long afterwards, in death.

That "Linda" is a work which has not had its fair share of success among Donizetti's works, I

word told—yet not a word was theatrical. Her expression, I have heard it said, was derived from her singing-master; but this was not to be detected.—It was grievous that a career, which might have lasted so long, and have been so rich in success to herself and pleasure to others, was shortened by mistaken ambition.—After her voice was settled, and her place as a concert-singer was assured, beyond all precedent, she *would* return to Italy, try the stage, and, most fatal of all, add a few upper notes to her voice.—This is never to be done with impunity. In Mrs. Shaw's case, when she appeared with Miss Kemble in the English versions of "Semiramide" and "Il Matrimonio," (a more drily-comical *Fidalma* was never seen), it was evident that the quality of her notes was impaired—that they had lost some of that equal richness, which had made a quaint speaker say that her voice reminded him of *black velvet*. The intonation, of course, very soon gave way—and there was no choice for the artist, save retirement. In this year, 1843, she was singing, under Mr. Macready's management at Drury Lane, in the "Saffo" of Signor Pacini—"done into English," and cast remarkably well—with Miss Clara Novello, herself, Herr Staudigl, and—in an accessory part—Mr. Sims Reeves.—Mr. Allen was then the principal tenor.

feel, so often as the long list of them comes before me. It was written with a careful solidity, not tried for in many of the operas slightly flung off by him. The story, founded on a sentimental French drama, "La Grace de Dieu" (which Madame Albert used to act in London so pathetically), is balanced betwixt what is lachrymose and what is disagreeable, and fails to provide that direct appeal to the sympathies which another sentimental opera story, kindred to it in quality, (that of "La Sonnambula"), furnishes.

But, among the music to this opera there is some of Donizetti's best. The Savoyard tune, belonging to the Savoyard peasant boy, with his hurdy-gurdy, is more characteristic than was the habit with the composer. The duett of *soprano* and tenor in the first act, has become a stock piece;—the *finale*, showing the departure of the simple hill-people for the town, has in it something real and touching. The second act is weaker, because the opera-book maker overwhelmed his heroine with four duetts;—the first, betwixt the deluded peasant girl and her faithful boy-friend who finds her out:—the second, with the insolent rake, who persecutes her with his coarse solicitations; the third, with the courtly lover who deluded her, in quiet disguise;—the fourth, with her father, in which she offers him alms, and he—little having guessed to whom he

was applying—in his homely virtue, denounces the child who has marked the hill-*chalet* with shame. All this is ill-considered, because too tightly straining the artist who has to present herself in these four doubtful situations;—and, after these, to conclude this luckless act, comes one of those scenes of incipient madness, by which it would almost seem as if Donizetti had been prophetically fascinated, so frequently do they recur in his operas. The drama, I repeat, is one ill laid out for music; since the third act—in which the crazed maiden's sense returns, and her lover does her justice, and her tempter is confounded, and her parents are thankfully ecstatic—is (for Opera) a situation as old as the hills—of Chamouni.

Of "Don Pasquale" I have already spoken, as the last, and not the least blithe, of comic Italian operas. The perfection with which its comedy was rendered, by Madame Grisi, Signor Mario, and Lablache, will not, it may be feared, be presently seen again. They revelled in the easy music—and Lablache seemed especially to court favour, by presenting the farce of fatness trying to make itself seductive. It used to be said, in Paris, that the *bouquet* which the dear, silly hero of the farce-opera wore in the coat which stuck to him with as terrible a closeness as the outside garment of a sausage does to the contents within—was offered,

night after night, by anonymous admirers.—But, throughout the entire farce of Lablache's performances, nothing was more admirable than his entire avoidance of grossness, or coarse intimation. There was, with him, that security which only belongs to persons of rare and admirable tact; and, with that security, the highest power of expressing comedy, tragedy, or grotesque,—because it belongs to one who will risk nothing hazardous, but who is not afraid of daring anything extraordinary.—When I hear of this person's style, and that person's high note, and when I think of Lablache, I am tempted to feel as if I had parted company with real comic genius on the musical stage for ever!

To return to Donizetti's share in this work of his dying brain,—the "Serenade," with its burthen of voices and guitars, written for Signor Mario, tells no tale of a dying brain; but, rather, is the song of one young in love, in life, in gaiety. Now it is hardly to be heard without a certain sadness, when the impending close of its composer's busy and wasted life is recollected. The opera, it is said, was the work of three weeks. It is certainly one of Donizetti's gayest.

The company this year was not satisfactory. The process of imperceptible substitution of what was second for what was first-rate, had steadily

set in as a principle of management. The great singers of the troop left sung under discouragement. Inferior ones were thrust forward, with too obvious a hardihood.

For some time there had been employed a system of cajoling the press till then tried on a very small scale;—and, howsoever complimentary to those of "the fourth estate," anything but flattering to the taste and judgment of our amateurs.—The "puff preliminary," by aid of which "whiting's eyes" were to be made to pass for "pearls," had begun, with regard to our Italian Opera, to assume forms of an invention and a courage hitherto unknown in England.—By way (it may be presumed) of reducing the expenses of an establishment, the name of which was synonimous with Chancery suits, mortgages, and their consequences, a steady intention of substituting cheaper and less perfect artists for the excellent ones who had satisfied the public, not merely by their individual genius, but by their mutual understanding in combination—began to manifest itself.—It was to be draped and masked, however, by every possible device.—Curiosity and mystery were to be set to work, by the artful aid of the paragraph-monger. It being gently intimated that the *corps* of our Italian Opera, (as it stood,) was growing indolent and senile, and that its members were overweening in their pretensions, we

next began to read of *this* peerless voice, secured at a fabulous price—of *the other* Southern beauty, with eyes like the moon and a "cypress waist;"—of some magnificent *Don Juan*—the real, original *Don Juan*, and the finest bass in the world—who had been known as the "Terror of Husbands" in Mexico.—No one henceforth, were he a star of second or third magnitude, was allowed to arrive in London without a symphony in the style of *Caleb Balderstone*—about *Mysie's* red herrings.

This year the management resolved to make a success for Signor Fornasari — as substitute for Signor Tamburini.—The new baritone was a tall, dashing man:—he possessed a very handsome face, a sufficient voice, though its quality was not pleasant —and pretension enough and to spare. He was one who sang with bad method and confidence, and who, though not obtrusively vulgar, must have impressed everyone with the conviction that he could merely have been successful among inferior artists, and in second-rate capitals.—His first appearance in "Belisario" imposed on many persons.—I confess to have been among the many imposed on.—There was something fresh, intense, and original, in the ways of Signor Fornasari—whether as singer or actor—which seemed to bespeak a pleasant and honest nature.—May none of us ever grow too old to welcome a young talent, nor too critical when a

new appeal is made to our sympathies!—Signor Fornasari's triumph in "Belisario" was complete.—It was the first of very many similar triumphs.—There were plaudits, glowing criticisms;—a full theatre, and myrmidons running to and fro, to prime the half-instructed or those timid in pronouncing judgment with an assurance, that this new singer was the greatest marvel whom Opera had yet seen in baritone form.—The world likes to believe (up to a certain point);—but, well-a-day for those who have memories,—and who cannot shut their ears to the Past: let the Present be ever so forcibly thrust into them!—That sensibility and excitement which gave to Signor Fornasari's first appearance a false air of genius, dwindled, flattened, and faded—night after night—part after part. The tremulous quality of his voice, (that vice of young Italy, bad schooling, and false notions of effect), became more monotonous and tiresome than the coldest placidity could have been.—His execution (there is none required in "Belisario," but much in Signor Rossini's operas,) proved rough, and belonging to a school of pretext—not of reality.—I think (great as was the seeming success of the hour) that Signor Fornasari's name might be totally forgotten in England, were it not that the chronicler has to tell all that has passed within his

experience.—But the success was a step on the stair downward, so far as the art of dramatic singing is concerned.

The orchestra of the Opera, on the other hand, had been worked up, by this time, into great beauty and European renown; and the chorus had, by the same able conductor, been made respectable, if not (as now) attractive.

THE YEAR 1844.

OPERAS.

"I Puritani," "Norma."—*Bellini.* "Il Matrimonio."—*Cimarosa.* "Don Carlos."*—*Costa.* "Adelia," "Don Pasquale," "Lucia," "Lucrezia," "Anna Bolena."—*Donizetti.* "Zampa."—*Herold.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "Corrado d'Altamura."*—*Ricci.* "La Cenerentola," "Semiramide," "Otello," "La Gazza."—*Rossini.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Persiani. Favanti.* Grisi. Rosetti.* — MM. Corelli.* Fornasari. Felice.* F. Lablache. Paltoni.* Lablache. Mario. Moriani.*

BALLETS.

"Esmeralda."* "La Vivandière."* "Zélie."* "La Paysanne."*

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Carlotta Grisi. Cerito. Fanny Elssler. — MM. Perrot. St. Leon.

THE YEAR 1844.

It is impossible to forget the odd events of this season, by which the ruin of Italian Opera, in the Haymarket, was pushed a substantial step forward. There was great apparent bustle—small real result.

Three new operas were produced.—The worthiest of these was Signor Costa's "Don Carlos," which opera had, nevertheless, not the good fortune to please the public.—Everyone knows the honours paid to a prophet in his own country; but there may have been other reasons why a work, so conscientiously written in the Italian style, was denied a place on the stage.—Elsewhere, the general possibility of any great conductor being a great composer, has been considered. An inventor must have the strength of a Hercules, and the self-abstraction of a Simon Stylites, who, having dealt with the in-

ventions of others incessantly, can give to his own fantasies and creations any remarkable individuality and freshness.—Then, the story of "Don Carlos" is a singularly gloomy and painful one for an opera-book. The contriver of words and situations for music has no power of redeeming the oppressive sorrow of its incidents—as a Schiller could do for the spoken drama, by the elevated nobility of his *De Posa*.—Divested of subtleties of character, the play becomes a strained melodrama, without any redeeming novelty of situation. Yet, "Don Carlos" is full of good music;—the orchestra throughout it is handled with a thorough knowledge of effect and colour;—Signor Costa, in this part of his writings, having proved himself a countryman of Cherubini, whose skilful, natural, yet striking use of instruments, cannot be too earnestly recommended as model.—One *trio*, for three male voices, is so solid and fine, that it ought not to have been so soon forgotten.

The attempt to place Herold's "Zampa" on the stage here, in a translated form, had been already tried by a German company;—but in England we have never taken very kindly to French serious Opera. No acceptance here has been procured for Spontini's "Vestale;"—"Robert le Diable" is received with indifference till this day.—Till 1844, it may have been remarked, that many of the musical

dramas most cherished in Paris have been, in London, stripped of much of their most important features, and served up in the form of *ballet*. The Italians, since the days of Rameau, have, as a nation, set their faces against French Opera; and our *dilettanti* have no less foolishly confined themselves to the pleasure derived from two schools of music —in place of enjoying three.—Only very lately has the Chinese Wall of such prejudice been forced down, in a place or two.—To myself, since the hour when my musical understanding began to wake, such narrowness has seemed inconceivable.—But I have never been able to rate "Zampa" as highly as it has been rated in France or in Germany, nor to join in the enthusiasm which the name of Herold, or in the regret which his death in full manhood, have excited.—There is something harsh in his brilliancy; something far-fetched in his sentiment;—his tunes are often sickly and puerile, or fail to satisfy the ear by some far-fetched interval or rhythm, which, however national, sound somewhat out of place.—For, here and there, it is evident that Herold, during his occupation as accompanist at the Italian Opera in Paris, had caught some of those peculiarities of Signor Rossini's manner—which that subtle master modified when he wrote for Paris, with wondrous grace, in "Le Comte Ory"—with surprising power of

transformation in "Guillaume Tell."—This want of nature and of settlement, which could be hardly illustrated here, is increased by the fact of the hero's part in "Zampa" having been written for one of those mixed voices, common enough in France,*—exceptional everywhere else. Indeed, it might be fairly said that M. Chollet, the original *Zampa*, was an excellent actor and an adroit musician, but one who had no real voice—his organ being a composition of baritone, tenor, *falsetto*—in no part of it tuneable, or graciously delivered.—Thus, the music of *Zampa's* part has, under alterations, been committed to both bass and to tenor singers, in Italy and Germany—of course, losing some of its peculiar effects in either case.—Here it was entrusted to a French gentleman, who had no voice at all, no stage experience—was totally untried in Italian;—the same who sang in London under five different names, as Signor Felice, Signor Planco, Monsieur

* It is impossible to make acquaintance with French Opera, and not become cognizant of the fact. Allowing for every possible difference of the diapason caused by modern desire for effect, it must be seen that the male parts in many of Gluck's operas (to give a most striking instance) were written for French voices—baritones with high notes—which have no representatives elsewhere—save, perhaps, in such a case as Herr Pischek's. Martin, at the *Opera Comique*, was a type-singer of this kind,—and Chollet was his representative, as is now M. Montaubry (1861) the representative of Chollet.

Felix, Monsieur Planque, and M. Delmar.—The luckless calculation on which this aspirant had been fished out of the depths of France, and been brought hither for his own mortification—and for the discredit of a first-class theatre, must be left to be settled by those who write the story of affairs behind the curtain.—But the year 1844 was a year when experiments of the kind, as will be presently seen, took the wildest form of offence to public common sense.—A more rueful failure than this deceived Frenchman's I have never seen.—The promises made for him in print beforehand availed him nothing.—He was modest enough, however, to lose presence of mind; and to be aware of the disgraceful absurdity of his attempt ere he had been ten minutes on the stage: failed in every point—of music, of singing, of entrance.—I think I now see Madame Persiani (who had, always, a somewhat anxious and ill-used look,) in utter despair, at some vagary transacted by him, seat herself resolutely down, with an appearance of giving up the entire matter as hopeless, and of contemptuous compassion for herself, which were almost farcical—and which provoked laughter at her helpless situation, in the midst of hisses for *Zampa's* incompetence.—This was her last season at the Haymarket Opera-house.

Subsequently, Signor Fornasari was prevailed on

to attempt the unlucky opera, but in vain. Under better circumstances, the work was tried again in another Italian theatre here, a few seasons ago —but with the same result.—It may be doubted whether the day for "Zampa" will ever come in England; in spite of the success which always attended its dashing Overture (here played marvellously)—and in spite of the breadth of the final duett, where Herold rises, for the only time, into the broad, sweeping passion of serious Opera.

Not more successful was the essay to introduce Signor Frederico Ricci as a composer, by his "Corrado d'Altamura:"—though at that time he was enjoying a certain vogue in Italy—a vogue completely extinguished by Signor Verdi's successes. Yet, that there is an "inkling" of the new effects in Signor Ricci's music seems to me, so far as I can recollect this opera; which was, once (or twice only, at the utmost,) played. There is the same rude noise in the instrumentation, under pretext of passion—the same violence in breaking the phrases of the show-music for the *prima donna*, by jerks and sharp cries—of pushing the animation onwards by the use of unisons and syncopations—of driving every effect to a spasmodic *crescendo*—as have since become the law; the same devices which have worn their authority out by their extravagance and falsity.—One *bravura*, given with amazing vigour by

Madame Grisi—who could then bring any desired amount of force to bear, and seemed to like grappling with a novelty—excited the audience.—There is, also, a pleasing *terzetto* towards the close of the opera, which might have been recognized had the music been decently rendered; or had our public been in its usual mood of somewhat torpid indulgence.—But this was the last character attempted by the English lady who sang as Mademoiselle Favanti; and her story—a repetition of Signor Felice's, with variations—had, in its progress of her singing one part, after another, worse and worse, so torn to pieces the patience of the audience, that she was ignominiously treated;—and the distaste of the public to pretensions so utterly baseless as those advanced for her—and fought for till the last with a desperation which became offensive—may have unconsciously helped to the rejection of Signor Ricci as a composer.—Since then none of his works have been tried here.—Of the lady it is necessary to speak separately.

A singer with claims far superior to those of Mademoiselle Favanti—Signor Napoleone Moriani—brought to England, is the last novelty of the year 1844, to be spoken of.—He came with a real Italian reputation—but he came too late in his own career, and too early for a public that had not forgotten what the great Italian tenors had been

at. Then, too, Signor Mario was already on that vantage-ground as first favourite, which he has since never left for an hour.—Signor Moriani must have had one of the most superb and richly-strong tenor voices ever heard, with tones full of expression, as well as of force.—But, either the reign of false taste had set in, encouraging him to drawl and to bawl;—or his voice had never been trained. Ere it came here, his command over it was gone. Yet, I was deceived for a while, by its remarkable beauty, into fancying the new-comer an artist from whom much might be obtained.—He had a striking, though heavily-moulded face, resembling that of the great man whose name he bore,—he was earnest in action. This, again, was some variety in a man aspiring to the succession of Rubini—whose indifference and powerlessness in scenes of passion had begun to be felt, in proportion as his voice came near being inaudible.—This earnestness deceived me.—I saw Signor Moriani twice in "Lucia," ere I began to be aware that the extreme prolongation of his last scene was wearisome—for other reasons than because the scene itself has always wearied me.—Later, it occurred to me that he had made its sickliness doubly heavy, instead of redeeming it by delicacy.—When one compared him in it with that of M. Duprez (also a weighty tenor, and an impassioned actor, and whose voice was already on its wane,)

the difference betwixt what is false and true in style—whether it be ponderous or florid, impressive or subtle—made itself felt, once and for ever.

Night by night—part by part—did the new tenor lose some of his first favour. A public once disposed to be wearied, can never be enkindled afterwards.—Better even (it has been said) to shock the world than to make it yawn.—The most strenuous resolutions behind the curtain, represented in the criticisms of the hour, could not sustain Signor Moriani.—Yet how many worse tenors from Italy, with good voices, who have since arrived—have I not lived to hear—and to see!

While the talk is of tenors, Signor Mario's attempt at the most difficult part in the Italian repertory—*Otello*—must not be overlooked.—Why and how it was a flight beyond his reach, even when his voice was in full bloom, and when he had every grace of manly beauty to recommend the personification, may be, perhaps, gathered in pages to come.

ENGLISH SINGERS AT THE ITALIAN OPERA.

SINCE the days of Mrs. Billington, who could hold her own against a Southern no less fascinating than Madame Grassini, it may be asserted that no female artist belonging to this country has been able to maintain anything approaching to a first position at the Italian Opera in London.—Yet many have appeared there,—more than will be remembered by the generality of hearers and readers, even during the period to which these notes refer.

A step for a year or two over their boundary, so far as 1827, may be permitted, in order to commemorate one of the cleverest of the company;—who might have done good service to the stage, had not her natural powers, at first barely sufficient, prematurely given way.—This was Miss

Fanny Ayton, who was more in the form and order of an Italian singer for comic Opera, than any of my countrywomen whom I have since heard or seen attempt it.—Her voice had been trained by good masters; it was a weak voice—not unlike that of Mdlle. Piccolomini, but more supple and flexible; —and it had a certain sprightly life in it.—She had considerable execution, a certain piquancy and taste of her own, and—what English artists generally lack so largely — accent.—Her appearance was pleasing; if it was not distinguished, not vulgar. Were such a singer as she was to appear now, I can imagine her succeeding, in a certain range of parts. —But the young girl had the misfortune to arrive here at a time when the great foreign artists were the rule, rather than the exception, and when "the Town" — totally differently composed from "the Town" of to-day—was in no respect disposed to be merciful to any new-comer who came without an immense foreign reputation.—The new *Rosina* and *Fiorilla* excited some attention and a little wonderment, by her clever ease on the stage, and her fluent Italian—but this was merely for the moment.—Her voice had small charm; and she had hardly sung here for three months ere its intonation gave way at once and for ever;—the tone becoming at the last too painful to be endured. She struggled on for a second season, in what

then passed for paraphrased foreign Opera on the English stage; she went down with Italian companies (in those days rarities) into our provincial towns;—she fought up courageously against disappointment and the failure of means for a year or two—and then passed out of public sight.

About the same time it was that Madame Vestris made her last appearance on our Italian stage. There, if she had possessed musical patience and energy, she might have queened it; because she possessed (half Italian by birth) one of the most luscious of low voices—found, since *Lear's* time, excellent in woman — great personal beauty, an almost faultless figure, which she knew to adorn with consummate art — and no common stage address. — But a less arduous theatrical career pleased her better; and so she, too, could not—one might perhaps say, because she *would* not—remain on the Italian stage.

The next British lady who attempted the feat was Miss Paton. Those who recollect that lady's style, and the means of popularity which she preferred to cultivate, need no words to explain why there was not the slightest chance of her grouping with any foreign play-fellows.

Indeed, whatever be his, or her, endowments, it must be always an ill chance for a home artist to sing in a foreign language on the stage in England. We

are curiously bad linguists ourselves, (*were*, I perhaps should say) but, before the curtain, we cannot endure bad language in those who amuse us.—We are too apt to spend on others the critical labour, which, were it applied at home, would be greatly to the ease and advantage of polyglott society.—The very few among us that are *not* bad linguists, are given to be unmercifully severe in the pride of their own acquirements and facility.—Behind the curtain, on the other hand, there are pitfalls and sunken rocks, still more difficult to cope with:—small and great perfidies—ungenerous rivalries, certain to be found in a calling so largely engaging personal vanity, and impossible to evade in a world where people must work with comrades whom they dread or despise, with whom they are perpetually thrown into contact—having abundant idling time for scandals to breed in.—All such evils come out in a form more or less pronounced, wherever there is a theatre;—but nowhere with so vehement a power to thwart, injure, and disconcert, as in the case which I am considering.

In the early time of our Royal Academy of Music,—a young English lady or two might be occasionally brought thence, as filling the second and third parts at the Opera House;—but the next of our countrywomen who need be named as making some position there, was Madame Alber-

tazzi.—She had many things in her favour;—an agreeable presence, and a musical *contralto* voice, not ill-trained.—For a time, it was fair to hope that she might prove an acceptable, if not an astonishing artist, could once her stage inexperience be corrected.—But the time of correction never came.—Hers was not (after all) so much inexperience as an utter lifelessness,—one more hopelessly cold than anything I have witnessed in a singer so fairly endowed as she was;—a resigned and cool indifference, which had something of the automaton in its quality, and which, after beginning by wearying, ended by irritating her audiences.—The German tale of the actress, contrived by science, and worked by springs—who tumbled into a dead heap of a rouged and leather doll, from time to time, —could hardly have had a closer illustration than from this pretty woman—with a good voice—good training, but with the absence of living charm.—To the end of her career—for, at a later period, Madame Albertazzi sang in English Opera—she remained the same;—inanimate beyond the power of intelligence to warm, or practical experience to quicken into the mere semblance of motion.

Of the next Englishwoman who, in the strange year 1834, made some impression at our Italian Opera, it would be pleasanter for me not to speak;—but the career seemingly determined for her, the man-

ner in which it was carried out, and its results can be overlooked by no historian.—The comedy began with a series of exciting and mysterious paragraphs, put forth in the morning papers.—A real treasure, said these, had been discovered at Naples—a young lady with an exceptional and splendid voice, boundless execution, and remarkable personal beauty, who was setting on fire the Capital of the Two Sicilies by her appearance in "La Cenerentola."—When one attestation of this kind after another had prepared the way, next came hints that there were hopes of securing this *Phœnix* for England:—A few weeks later we were invited to rejoice that such hopes were certainties;—because then, the print-shops began to tell of the coming enchantress, in a lithograph which bore out report. A more charming head has not often been shown by the skilful hand that drew it.—Further precise and minute warrants "followed suit."—It was announced that Madame Pasta had expressed the highest admiration of the coming young lady's talent.—She was heralded, in short, not by a mere note, but rather by an opera of preparation, with overture, chorus, orchestra, *solo singers*, dresses and decorations—all complete, and on the most superb and extensive scale.

Some enquiry, however, ventured in honest curiosity by those, like myself, who could have no

dream of the reality, made persons having memories ponder and wonder.—Many, like myself, had heard the new *Cenerentola* at home some years before. Many, like myself, could accredit the splendid compass of her voice (of three octaves almost), and its promise of fine quality. But it was less encouraging to recollect certain peculiarities;—among these, a measureless courage in ornament, considering the utter deficiency of its execution—a memory more than ordinarily uncertain—an absence of perception when memory failed—and an ignorance of Music which six months' training ought to have rectified.—Miracles are rare in this age. Then, the plea of nervousness avails little; since those who know Music the best are the most ready to admit it.—A wrong note on the *piano*, a false phrase in the voice, may befall any performer overcome with fear, be he old or young;—but a deliberately gratuitous change into bad grammar of a musical passage, for the sake of exhibition—or the singing through an entire ballad without any variation in the accompaniment of the notes of the first chord—these things argue qualities out of which it is very hard to fabricate a real artist.—These things I had heard,—and by their very extremity and strangeness,—could hardly be forgotten by me.

The curtain drew up for "La Cenerentola," and Mademoiselle Favanti was discovered, in that exqui-

site introductory scene, than which even Signor Rossini never wrote anything more exquisite. As was the due of so striking-looking a person—as was only natural after the preludes, into the value of which few had cared to inquire—the new *Cenerentola* was welcomed, with that sort of universal applause which terrifies, but which yet inspirits its object. And thus, too, when she opened her mouth to sing "*Una volta*," the natural richness of her lower notes awakened the rapture anew and louder. But in this very self-same simple fireside ballad, she gratuitously introduced a turn flagrantly out of the key —exactly as she had done in old times. I wondered; but the ballad was called for as vehemently as if Madame Alboni had sung it—and with the repetition came the ignorant turn over again.—It was obviously a cherished grace with the new *Cenerentola!*

> "Where ignorance is bliss,
> 'Tis folly to be wise."

The opera proceeded, in no better fashion and with the loudest plaudits (considering the pretending badness of the performance) ever heard. Never before—not when Mdlle. Taglioni was young, and Mdlle. Fanny Elssler in the noon-tide of her witcheries—had "the enthusiasm carried in baskets" to the upper regions, rained itself down on the Goddess of the night in such number, such enormous size, such costliness of bouquets. The

scene, with all its mock triumph, was humiliating beyond any spectacle of the kind at which I have ever been present, at home or abroad. Of its sequel no sincere person could entertain one instant's doubt.—Yet, the morning after, those at a distance who read, might be excused for believing that a new Malibran—nay, more than a Malibran—had come.

Time, however, may be trusted. No predetermined support (supposing such ever so lavishly organized)—no blowing of the trumpets (supposing the brass ever so Corinthian)—can save their victim. Mdlle. Favanti attempted other characters—in every new one more and more distinctly displaying her unfitness for the greatness thrust upon her;—unable to sing—unable to act—unable to recollect her music;—still, maintaining an air of self-assertion, not wonderful, considering what the fooling of false praise had been. Of all the opera-feats which I recollect, the most extraordinary was made when she was thrust into "Don Giovanni," as one capable of taking part in Mozart's master-opera.—In the concerted piece, "*L'empio*," when she has to support, to answer, to aid her comrades, she was totally lost—and (thanks to Signor Costa) the orchestra and her comrades leaped after her, so as to cover her incapacity for the moment.

But incapacity is not to be covered.—It is sure

to display itself, ten times more rudely and crudely, because of the rapacity and credulity of those who protect it.—In "La Gazza Ladra," when she had to sing with Madame Grisi as heroine, as *Pippo*, she found it expedient to pass off her want of tune, time, and execution, by aid of a laced handkerchief,—in the sweetest stage propriety, belonging to a peasant boy of Palaiseau!—No singer on the stage with her could provide for her errors, her omissions, her courageous incompetence.—But, ere the end of the season she was hissed off the stage (a painful, yet not an unnatural,* last act to the farce), to reappear there only once again after the lapse of many years; and again to show that

* Not unnatural, perhaps—but surely a relic of barbarism. No woman, were men courteous, should be thus cruelly insulted, unless the woman should have forgot the decencies of Woman's modesty. Let those who have placed her in so false a position be brought to account.—This has been done in Italy—where, after the very bad singing of the wife of a public favourite, *he* was called for, and was hissed violently for allowing his wife to appear.—But it is not always that the men of Italy are so temperately courteous. I was present, some years ago, in *La Scala*, Milan, at the representation of an opera—"Saul"—by *Maestro* Cannetti. The unfortunate *prima donna* (who has since gained some reputation) did not please the Lombard *dillettanti*. When the quick movement of her great air began, some twenty coarse male creatures stood up in their stalls and sang it with her;—when she retired, in still more brutal fashion, crying, in their harsh Milanese voices—"*Brutta! brutta!*"

she was the old *Cenerentola*—no better than she had been.

This an over-true tale—sad, and bad, and sorrowful. For who will not follow the so-called artist home into her triumphs, prospects, destroyed hopes? —I should not, here, have tried to tell it again, had it not been for the injury which the false success of so utterly worthless a singer (no matter how gifted by Nature) was permitted to be inflicted on those who were set round her during the gingerbread-fair of her first triumphs,—and for the bitterness with which persecution attended those who ventured to hint in print, that Mademoiselle Favanti was *not*, for the present, a second and a better Malibran.

There is one more appearance of a country-woman on our foreign Opera-stage to be recorded—that of the Irish lady, Miss Catherine Hayes. This was made under different circumstances; and many years later.—She was a singer who had a right to a hearing at home, in consequence of the real impression made by her in Italy, where her graceful voice and presence, and her sensibility had won for her a genuine popularity. She was there accepted, as a stranger deserving every courtesy. Her style, too, pleased in Italy—because it approached the long-drawn, false, over-emphatic style, which Italy has liked since Signor Verdi's reign began,—but which

we have not as yet accepted.—I have noted (by the way), as a characteristic frequent in artists Irish by birth, a tendency towards what is sentimental and deliberate in singing—which is singular in a people so mercurial in temperament as they. On our English ears it never fails to produce an impression of weariness, after a while. And in our modern days, the old-fashioned spinners-out of our glees, who delighted in a "dying fall" *pianissimo*—the ballad-singers, who had no mercy on the patience of their listeners—are no longer thought gracious, willowy and expressive.—We have learned that measurement of time is of some value in Music: we even drawl a little less on the stage than we did formerly.—Let it be added, that this effect to drawl and to slacken time is sure, after a while, to tempt those who attempt it into exaggerations of which they are unaware; that the very style which calls for the nicest possible regulation, has within itself an element of disease almost impossible to cure.—Let me again remind my world, that an Italian success in nowise ensures an English one, has been proved by the coldness with which artists, in Italy so popular as Mdes. Frezzolini, Tadolini, and Barbieri-Nini—have been met in London.—We English stand under blame and contempt abroad, as a people devoid of delicacy in connoisseurship, whenever we fail to equal the raptures

which have been stirred on the other side of the Alps—how far justly or otherwise it would not be my place here to determine.

There is no doubt, however, that Miss Hayes approached nearer the standard of Italian than of English perfection; and, ere long, her success in her national music, especially at home, was found so much more substantial and available than any to be gained as the representative of *Lucia* or *Linda* or *Amina*, or the sentimental parts which had earned her showers of roses, garlands, bouquets, and sonnets, in Italy — that she did wisely in changing her career, and in principally, thenceforth, confining herself to the concert-room.

Now that she is gone,—why should it not be said that she was no musician?—and thus was fit, on our stage, for no change or adaptability beyond her two or three sentimental parts,—(every *cantilena* in which had to be much elongated)—in our concert-room, for nothing beyond an opera-song or two, given with some appearance of vocal style (totally without verbal declamation)—and some national ballads, which never seemed to arrive at their end.—Her "*Last Rose of Summer*" always seemed to me long-drawn enough to hold out, till it should come to be transformed into "*The Rose-bud of Spring.*" —She was most gentle, most gracious, yet (because inarticulate) rather wearisome.

Two words, by way of postscript to this chapter on a delicate subject, may be devoted to another of the English ladies who maintained for many years considerable favour on the Italian stage*—Madame Albertini—One appearance!

* As the above sketches inevitably involve comparisons, and allusions to nationality, a word may be said with reference to Italian successes, in sequel to the note on Italian failures. The exaggeration of the former amounts, at times, to an insanity, which must be seen to be credited. I was present, in 1845, at the benefit of Signor Giuli Borsi at Vicenza, and will repeat what was written in a journal letter of the time:—

"This is a meritorious singer, with a voice capable of sustaining itself through an evening of Signor Verdi's music without a sign of fatigue. She got through her executive passages tolerably—and no more. Yet, how a Pasta or a Malibran could have been made more of by the Vicentines, it would be hard to conceive—unless they had revived the old sumptuous fashion of flinging purses of gold on the stage. Wreaths by the fifty, bouquets by the five hundred (every one of which the lady of the night was compelled to pick up for herself, on being called for some twenty times, at least); a splendid lyre let down from 'the flies,' with the *virtuosa's* initials among its strings; and a stage-cherub, who, like *Gill*, came 'tumbling after' through a shower of rose-leaves; while the men roared applause as if their hearts (and sticks) must break, and the ladies waved '*Bravas!*' in their handkerchiefs—such an uproar of enthusiasm I never witnessed What, I thought, must be the disappointment of such a Queen in her own country, when she tries London or Paris?—What chances remain of her perfecting herself in her art, when she is thus crowned as consummate? Again, it is increasingly the

fashion with our young English ladies to come here by way of perfecting their musical studies. Now, supposing that one of these is in accord with her manager, (no unlikely thing, if he secures her on cheap terms), and popular with her audience because of the piquancy of a foreign voice, and the generic sweetness of an English face—she may come in for such an ovation—she is sure to be present at many—what hope is there, after such scenes, that her own calm sense, or her friends' strict kindness, will estimate these plaudits at their just value?—of her being strong enough in self-knowledge and discipline to resist the intoxicating flattery? This same benefit of *La* Giuli Borsi explained to me why so many return home little better than when they left it, with strained voices, a few *prima donna* ways, and not a few *prima donna* expectations.

THE YEAR 1845.

OPERAS.

"La Sonnambula," "Norma," "Il Pirata."—*Bellini.* "Lucia," "L'Elisir," "Linda," "Roberto Devereux."—*Donizetti.* "Il Giuramento."—*Mercadante.* "Cosi fan Tutte."—*Mozart.* "Semiramide," "Otello."—*Rossini.* "Ernani."*—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Grisi. Castellan.* Rita Borio.* Rossi-Caccia.* Brambilla.* Rosetti.—MM. Mario. Moriani. Botelli.* Fornasari. Lablache. Baroilhet.* Corelli.

BALLETS.

"La Dryade."* "Rosida."* "Le Pas de Quatre."*

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Cerito. Grahn.* Carlotta Grisi. Taglioni. The Viennese Children.—MM. St. Leon. Perrot.

M. Felicien David's "*Desert*" Symphony.

THE YEAR 1845.

THE strength of this season lay in the *ballet*—or, rather, in a single dance, executed by Mdes. Taglioni, Carlotta Grisi, Cerito, and Grahn.—Perhaps the fascination of the "twinkling feet" of these four ladies, grouped as Chalon has put on record, was devised to withdraw attention from the inattention to the interests of Opera, and from the gradual substitution of inferior for superior singers, which was obviously the system of management.

The only novelty in Opera attempted during the year 1845 was the "Ernani" of Signor Verdi—by this time become an Italian celebrity who was no longer to be overlooked.—The first work of his introduced here, shared the fate of Bellini's and Donizetti's first works in England. It was received with curiosity rather than sympathy. To myself, it gave hopes which have not been justified by its

writer's subsequent operas, more popular though they have been. His style, for a moment, struck the ear by a certain rude force and grandeur. How vulgar these have seemed to us, owing to reiteration, will be presently dwelt on.

"Ernani" was spiritedly performed.—The heroine, Madame Rita Borio, was, in every sense of the word, a stout singer, with a robust voice—a lady not in the least afraid of the violent use to which the latest Italian *maestro* forces his heroines, but able to scream in time, and to shout with breath enough to carry through the most animated and vehement movement of those devised by him. Owing to want of personal attraction, this lady, who proved herself estimable in other music, did not enjoy a success in London such as singers far inferior to herself have since commanded.

To replace Madame Persiani, was brought Madame Castellan; who thenceforward enjoyed, during some years, a settled occupation of trust and variety on our two Italian Opera stages. So far as industry and general utility, a pleasing person and a competent voice, entitled their owner to public favour, the new French *prima donna* was eminently qualified. But she fell short of complete excellence in every point, save that of adaptability. Her voice, an extensive *soprano*, having both upper and lower notes sufficient in power, was never

thoroughly in tune. The tone, too, of the voice, though not disagreeable, was, somehow, squeezed in its production. There was no stint of execution on her part; but, neither scale, nor shake, nor *arpeggio*, nor interval, was thoroughly wrought out. In concerted music, Madame Castellan's voice (as may be often remarked with French voices) refused to blend with other voices. Her appearance was genteel and piquant, and her acting, in gentle parts, was unembarrassed, if not very expressive. This may appear to be—indeed is—a character made up of negatives; and herein may have lain the cause why Madame Castellan, though she was always courteously received, never excited the slightest enthusiasm. One might say of her, once for all—that she spoiled nothing—that she created nothing. She could be only rated as a *prima donna* in a second-class Opera-house. Her amenity of manner, however, and the sedulous care she always showed to keep faith with the public, maintained her long in London; and since she has passed from the stage, she has never been replaced by any one equivalent to her.

The third novelty of 1845—also a French lady—stands, I think, in a category altogether different. Madame Rossi-Caccia was one of those clever persons whose destiny it is, never (so runs their complaint) to have been rightly comprehended.—The

solution of their enigma may be, that there is little to comprehend, save that affectation which spoils everything, be it ever so cleverly managed or prepared. The lady was *prima donna* at the *Opera Comique* of Paris for a while.—M. Auber wrote his "Part du Diable" for her there.—She was the heroine, too, of one of the merriest musical farces ever seen—M. Montfort's "Polichinelle" (a little opera which has unaccountably perished). There, however, she failed to keep her ground.—She was too good for her work.—Her arena (she conceived) was to be a larger stage; and, accordingly, she passed over into Italy,—there to get the stamp of authentication for which so many have tried, and which, with so many, has proved the merest of old delusions. After this, she sang at the *Grand Opera* of Paris—for which, again, she was too good, or not good enough (I forget which).—On the strength of some of the above pretexts, she was brought here—with what result needs not be told.—She was a clever woman, of an uncertain age, who had two or three *soprano* notes far above an ordinary voice—and her voice was very ordinary—and who held out on those cruel notes with a fatiguing persistence, helped out by the play of eyes and of shoulders.—I never saw a woman act with so many shrugs of the latter,—when the emotion became overmastering,—as did Madame Rossi-Caccia.

It will be seen that the French element was already beginning to take a large share in our Italian Opera House;—owing to the decadence of the great Italian art of singing, and to English unwillingness to accept vocalists who could only bawl and gesticulate, in place of the real women and men who, by their singing and acting, had for a century past charmed London into a knowledge and a naturalization of Italian Opera.—The third new singer, far higher in class than either of the two ladies, was also French.—M. Baroilhet had possessed a winning and rare baritone voice. This, however, had been torn to pieces on the other side of the Alps—where he had been singing for some years, in the operas of the new school, so-called—and, when he came home to Paris, not much was left, beyond a certain breadth of method and warmth of style, to which his peculiar appearance added some emphasis and effect. No small share of the French success of Donizetti's "La Favorite," commissioned for Madame Stoltz, who then ruled the French Opera, it was said, and could controul its reigning powers "to have or to leave"—was due to M. Baroilhet's singing of the *King's* song, "*Pour tant d'amour*," on which every amateur baritone rushed, till the tune became as stale as Signor Verdi's "*Il balen*" is now: neither tune having vigour to support itself after the first moment of Fashion has

passed. He was picturesque on the stage, to see—though his picturesqueness was pushed to the verge of grotesque, and owing much to the stage-tailor. The singing went with the face and figure—at least, when M. Baroilhet was here—his singing having just those effects and defects which leave an English public doubtful whether the public is to laugh or to cry. It is curious, that the self-same audiences who are insensible to the conventionalisms of our own stage-diction—who will bear any amount of mouthing, or drawling, or chopping-up of the text in the poetry of Shakespeare without wincing, under pretext of Tradition—remain so undecided, or break out so sarcastically—when any manifestation of earnestness, beyond the pale of their own rubric of attitude or pronunciation, is set before them.

This year, however, other breaches were made in the wall of our anti-Gallican prejudices than by the engagement of the three French singers just mentioned. M. Duprez was here for a second time—the finest dramatic tenor singer I have ever heard and seen on the stage—giving our careless countrymen—not merely lessons how to sing, how to act, so as to make natural disqualifications forgotten—but absolutely, too, how to speak their own language audibly and accurately. I have not heard since Braham's time—till Mr. Sims Reeves came—

the great tenor *solo*, in the second part of the "Messiah," "*Thy rebuke*," so perfectly sung and said as by M. Duprez. He had had to fight for every word of his English;—whereas our English singers seem, on a sort of set principle, to fight against their own language—or, otherwise, never to have learned to read.—And the singing of M. Duprez, in this "Messiah" music—in English—was a much harder feat for a born Frenchman—except for a man born with such an indomitable will as himself—than it would be for any Italian singer to transform himself into a few French songs.—Oratorio music is utterly beyond the comprehension of our neighbours. They have a notion of Mèhul's "Joseph." They have no reserve in putting the most sacred personages on the stage.—They do not understand, or do not care to know, Handel. And yet this great French tenor, in the strength of his feeling for dramatic truth, propriety, and (most of all) his determination never to present himself without doing the best of his best—could master an unfamiliar style of music, and a barbarous language (so our neighbours repute it to this day)—and could sing when his voice was half gone; and could say when his new speech had hardly come to him—both his singing, and his saying, having such perfection of intellect (not of organ) as makes the

singing and still more the *saying* by a foreigner—remembered.

During this same year a Belgian company, at another theatre, was giving unmutilated and meritorious versions of the various works in the repertory of French Opera, and was habituating our connoisseurs and critics to admit the existence of a third school of music—which is one as remarkable after its kind as the schools of Italy and of Germany.

The history of French Opera, as part and parcel of the singularly coherent world of French art, has to be written for England.—Even so lately as thirty years ago, when Signor Rossini and M. Meyerbeer were carrying on the work begun and continued by Lulli, Rameau, Gluck, Sacchini, Lesueur, Spontini—when "La Muette" had dazzled all Europe, an opera pronounced by Paganini, as it has been said, to be the finest opera ever composed—the serious musical Drama of France, and its singers, were spoken of by English *dilettanti* with mockery.—The same people who would take anything German on trust, or swoon in ecstacies over the sickliest and most trite Italian music, did not so much despise—as ignore—the existence of a treasury rich in dramatic truth and beauty, and musical skill;—and, fixing on certain national peculiarities of voice and manner, heaped ridicule on a race of singers, who proved themselves compatriots of

Clairon, Le Kain, Duchesnois, Mars, and Talma.—Such toleration as the Comic Opera of Paris enjoyed—written by men no less individual than Gretry, Dalayrac, Monsigny, Philidor, Berton, Isouard, Boieldieu, and M. Auber—was owing to the sprightliness of the acting—rather than to the sparkle and *esprit* of the music.—I have told with what persistence every French opera was travestied here, to serve the uses of *ballet* during half of the period to which these pages refer. It was long and late—perhaps (in some small degree) owing to the perpetual representations of a few persons, who preferred enjoying *three* to enjoying *two* things—ere the Englishman, who had enjoyed, in his reading and in his sympathies, Molière and De Sevigné, and, later, Châteaubriand and Hugo, consented to relax his irrational contempt against listening, and approval.

The experiment of 1845, however, met with only partial encouragement.—Truth to say, as a body, the Belgians, however meritorious and correct, are curiously heavy as musicians. Perhaps they pay the penalty, belonging to mixed races, of deficiency in nationality; but, that there is a German touch in their execution of French music, and a French humour in their German interpretations—and something of French and German mixed when they deal with Italian compositions—

I have fancied so often as I have thought over any performances largely enacted by natives of that rich and respectable land.

To return to the Italian Opera House — the performances of M. Felicien David's "Desert" Symphony, were a natural consequence of the rage which that slight and pleasing work had excited in Paris, on its production there. The excellence of our English execution of this symphony must not be forgotten to the credit of Signor Costa, as head of an admirable orchestra.—That we fell short of the French raptures over M. David's picturesque work, is no wonder; seeing that already the Symphony hardly now exists in Paris.—The Oriental grace and wildness of certain portions (such as the *Danse d'Almées*, which is a gem after its kind), could not give permanent life to a composition of such length, in which the constructive and sustaining power was so very small.

Great attempts were made to warm our public into the enjoyment of a troop of dancing children from Vienna—the odds and ends of the once famous children's *ballets* there. The institution had been broken up, owing to the scandals it had originated —scandals too strong for even Austrian supineness in morals to wink at.—Certainly, if the two dozen girls who came to England were, in the least, fair specimens of what the establishment had produced,

there was no compensation (if the word may be degraded so far) in their grace, skill, or promise, for the peril and corruption to which they and their predecessors had been exposed in a licentious metropolis.—The show was pitiful and awkward—and (all credit be to English good taste and good feeling—not always to be relied on, however,—even should the prodigy be clever, and the monster shocking enough), it was withdrawn, after a few exhibitions had satisfied "the Town" that the said exhibition was worthless and unattractive.

THE YEAR 1846.

OPERAS.

"I Puritani," "La Sonnambula."—*Bellini.* "Il Matrimonio." — *Cimarosa.* "Linda," "Belisario," "Anna Bolena," "Lucrezia," "L'Ajo nell Imbarazzo."* — *Donizetti.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "Nino,"* "I Lombardi,"* "Ernani."—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Sanchioli.* Corbari.* Castellan. G. Brambilla.* Grisi. Pasini.*—MM. Corelli. Fornasari. Botelli. Mario. Lablache. F. Lablache.

BALLETS.

"Catarina."* "Lalla Rookh."*

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Grahn.* Cerito. Taglioni. — MM. Perrot. St. Leon.

THE YEAR 1846.

THIS was a year of confusion :—the principal event of which was a forcible attempt to give Signor Verdi that place on the London stage which he already held in the Opera-houses of Italy.—Two works, as yet unheard, were brought to hearing.—The first was "Nino"—a grand opera offered in conjunction with the excitement of the re-opening of the theatre, elaborately, if not tastefully decorated—and with the appearance of a new set of artists, and a new conductor.

"Nino" in England is "Nabucco" in Italy—an Old Testament opera, permitted in Catholic countries, but an opera which must here be re-baptized—even as Signor Rossini's "Mosé" had been for England. We English are not so hard, or so soft, as to be willing to see the personages of Holy Writ acted and sung in theatres. Hagar

in the wilderness—Ruth gleaning among the "alien corn"—Herodias with the head of John the Baptist in the charger—are subjects of personal exhibition which all thoughtful lovers of art in music must reject, on every principle of reverence and of taste, and from which the thoughtless would recoil,—because, perhaps, they are not so amusing as "La Traviata." The castigation of "Nabucco" is a measure never to be carried out without loss of strength, character, and reality.—Who could bear one of Shakespeare's plays acted from the text of Bowdler?

The other opera by Signor Verdi new to England, fared, in one important respect, better than "Nabucco," in which the frantic and ungracious part of the heroine had been given to Signora Sanchioli — a singer without the slightest charm, who figured strangely on the stage in her Amazonian attire, and who screamed in a manner to which British ears were as yet unaccustomed.—We have, since that time, been called on to habituate ourselves with *every—all—no* manner of screams in Italian singing.—Signora Sanchioli accomplished no popularity, for herself or for the *maestro.* His "Lombardi"—a work subsequently arranged for the *Grand Opera* of Paris as "Jerusalem" —had the aid of Madame Grisi and Signor Mario in the principal parts. The music, even then, be-

trayed the wear of the lady's peerless voice; and she sang it shyly rather than kindly. Her appearance, in her Mediæval dress of crimson and blue veil, was superb.—I recollect her figure as I do some picture from a Gothic missal. The sickly *cavatina* for the tenor, which the barrel-organs made us hate ere "*Il balen*" was thought of, was given delightfully by Signor Mario; and the rude vigour of certain concerted pieces made itself felt; —but the opera did not stand.—Even in Italy, I conceive, "I Lombardi" is laid by, as one of the less fortunate works of its writer.—"Ernani," never cordially received in this country, was, at its second performance, doomed by the miserable company of singers—grandly heralded in the papers—to whom it was intrusted. Only the lady is worth naming, because she has, since 1846, come to the light of success, as Madame Gassier.

The trial of Donizetti's "L'Ajo" was useless. That comic opera is not among his happy comic operas. This was all the musical novelty of the season—with the exception of another attempt to transform M. Auber's operas into *ballets*, in "Catarina"—a danced version of his extravagant, yet charming, "Diamans de la Couronne."

This year Signor Costa quitted the Opera; and the orchestra, which he had brought to a point of perfection previously unknown in England, passed

into other hands. It was a sign of change that the departure of a Conductor could shake an Opera house—a sign that discipline, and integrity, and thorough knowledge of the duty in hand by the man who undertakes such duty—be it in the Opera, be it in any other world—make their worth known, soon or late, in this honest country of ours.—That the Italian Opera at Her Majesty's Theatre—then our only one—never recovered the loss of Signor Costa, is matter of operatic history.—Show followed show—sham succeeded to sham—great singers came and went—but our world had been educated up to a point, at which the entire performance was felt to be the real object of interest; and though (for a year or two) this, and the other great singer, made that meteoric impression which dazzles the public for a while, the year 1846 must be quoted as the first of some years of exhaustion and failure at the old House in the Haymarket.

This was the year when the air began to be stirred from afar by rumours of a new singing marvel—too shy to come to England.—A more thoroughly distasteful subject than the machinery set in motion to recommend Mdlle. Jenny Lind, cannot pass under any truthful writer's pen. It is not, however, to be escaped from.—Never, in our time, have the vaccillations and the private virtues of an

artist been so ruthlessly advertised, so perpetually kept in sight of the public.—The lady herself was, of course, unconscious of the uses to which her charities and her talents were put. If she broke engagements—if she declared, again and again, that nothing would induce her to dare the venture of England—such story of private caprice (or calculation) might have died away, in this busy London world of ours, as a nine days' wonder—had it not been hammered at, and wrought up,—had it not been repeated, and speculated on in print, day by day—week by week—month by month.—But out of this sagacious use of a history as old as woman's fickleness, and woman's beneficent heart, a lever of curiosity was forged—the force of which seems ridiculously exaggerated at this distance of time.—The uses to which it was put were manifold and ingenious.—It was worked, with incessant violence, to enable the Opera management to "tide over" a season of most inferior performances. If one dared to whisper in the pit a suspicion that the orchestra was not what it had been—that some of the new singers, announced so fiercely by trumpets ere they came and after they had come, had not proved so many new Pastas, Malibrans, Sontags—"Yes," (ran the answer), "but what can we do?—Jenny Lind is *not* coming!"

So, during the season of 1846 everyone was invited

to be content—to regret no celebrities departed—to acquiesce in every deteriorated performance;—in fact, to put up with the opera, on some vague fancy that the future was to be great indeed,—though "Jenny Lind was *not* coming."—Everyone, however, was *not* content; all glorious and all but unanimous as were the printed plaudits of the increasing success of Her Majesty's Theatre.—This is a disagreeable subject; but one from which I cannot shrink, as matter of history.—The general tone of the journals, during the year 1846 and following years, was little creditable to the judgment (assuming it sincere) of those who, day by day, dealt with public opinion, under pretence of directing it.—There was no record of failure;—none of a growing dissatisfaction among the unbiassed audience—nothing to point out to distant, innocent persons, that a system of commanded applause had been organized with great care; that the plaudits, and recalls, and *bouquets* were unreal, and represented not what lovers of Music felt and thought, but what would serve the profits of the manager. The so-called power of journalism had never a greater rebuke than in the downfall of Her Majesty's Theatre—day by day described as unparagoned in the splendour of its performances, and as enjoying a well-deserved prosperity!—Truth and Time may be trusted, in England at least; but

the defiance of both, in regard to appreciation of art at its real value, and of attempting to hold fast the ear of "the Town" for the moment, has, in no case which I recollect, during many years of duty on the press, been so complete and so general as in this particular one.

The thing is past and gone,—even as a nightmare or a feverish dream pass and go. Despite of checks and drawbacks, and strange spirts of temporary enthusiasm on the one hand, and on the other of an exclusiveness, which is most hurtful to art,—the taste for and the culture of Music in England have so far advanced, that I conceive it would be now impossible to force success,—as success was forced in the day to which I refer.

SIGNOR MARIO.

THERE have been better singers—there have been better musicians — there may have been better voices—than Signor Mario. There has been no more favourite artist on the stage, in the memory of man or of woman, than he. It was not, however, till the season of 1846 that he took the place of which no wear and tear of Time has been able to deprive him.—The admiration is easy to explain,—referable, as it has been, to Nature and circumstance rather than to artistic perfection.

The last word (as the French have it) has yet to be said on the subject of amateur art.—There may be difficulty in crediting it with certain good qualities, without introducing confusion of ideas among those who would listen justly, and without discouraging labour in those who would study.—This, however, may be pointed out. Let the

vocation be ever so real—let the ambition be ever so honourable—there may be in all professional education one tendency to be watched,—a too direct and anxious reference to results—to immediate praise and popularity,—and this in no world more than in Music; because there personal exhibition enters more largely as an element, than in any other exercise of the imagination.—The vanity and self-assertion of amateurs, as a class, need not be commented nor laughed at here; but the best of their class have hardly been allowed their dues, as showing glimpses of an elegant and refined fancy, belonging in part to circumstance, in part to social position.—So long as the general education of the artist is little attended to—so long as it is held that nimble fingers, a flexible throat, and an instant power of reading a score,—that invention of melodies and combination of chords,—absolve their owner from the possession of any other knowledge or accomplishment—there will be occasionally apparent some advantage on the side of those, whom the pleasure of attempting some expression of what is beautiful, and not the business of Life, urges forward.—In the midst of much that is doleful and ridiculously affected and pretending, there will be found, however sparingly, from time to time, something to remind the world that gentle nurture and liberal cultivation have a distinct value

and influence—that a Lulli brought from his cooking-furnacês, and a Mendelssohn breathing the best air of intelligence, affection, and culture from his cradle-days, do not enter into the lists on the same terms.—That "antecedents" are terribly abused, is of no consequence to the argument;—because, when a name and an escutcheon are brought to market, as a make-weight for the song ill-sung, or the picture badly drawn, the Trader, by such transaction, becomes more vulgar than the veriest child of the kennel, who struggles his way to success through poverty and hardship, with an imperfect sense of that which is wanting to him.—To assert that they are without value, is false and unphilosophical—a dream of the levellers:—one which, if borne out, would make an end of every hope, every thought, every gracious prompting or guidance, by which the human creature is armed for life.

It will not satisfy many of Signor Mario's enthusiastic admirers to be told that, throughout his career, he has never wholly got beyond amateurship—has never been a thorough artist, armed at all points for his duties before the public. Such, however, is the case.—The charm of personal appearance and graceful demeanour, borne out by a voice the persuasive sweetness of which can never have been exceeded, has fascinated everyone—the stern as well as the sentimental—into forgetting

incompleteness and deficiency, which diligent and thoughtful study might have remedied ere Rubini's successor had been on the stage a couple of years. There has been no desire, no possibility of reckoning with one so genially endowed by Nature—with so much of the poet and the painter in his composition, and of the nobleman in his bearing.—Lines, rules, precedents, comparisons, must sometimes be forgotten; and it is well.—Those do not know the least, or judge the worst, who fairly surrender themselves to their sympathies—when they cannot help it.

In one point the career of Signor Mario has been peculiar—it might be said, unique.—He will live in the world's memory as the best Opera lover ever seen; as one who in a range of parts, always difficult, oftentimes insipid, never failed to give a charm and a probability to the scene, to the like of which the world has been unaccustomed.—It is one thing to warble a song, as did Rubini, and to sigh out a part in a duett;—but to be *Count Almaviva*—or *Gennaro*, in "Lucrezia"—or *Raoul*, in "Les Huguenots"—demands not only beauty of voice and person, and easy youth of bearing, but certain qualities, also, akin to those which rule the stage in *Orlando* and *Romeo*.—There must be that feeling of youth which, in some happily-gifted persons, never grows old—there must be that aban-

donment to the sensation of the moment which no study can entirely prepare. The passion duett, in the fourth act of M. Meyerbeer's greatest opera, as acted by Signor Mario, is a thing to be forgotten by no one that has ever seen it. The tenderness, the passion—the struggle, the fury—the inevitable necessity at last to abandon even the partner of the lover's passion—when the terrible bell of St. Bartholemew rings out, and when the massacre-night begins, under the eyes of the man faithless to his faith, and entrapped (so to say) into a love alien from it,—these things, helped by no ordinary youth, and beauty of person, of voice, of pictorial and picturesque fancy, and of natural refinement in breeding—were represented by Signor Mario, as we shall, possibly, never see them represented again.—In the former duel scene of the same opera (here most cruelly cut short) he lacked weight; having to reserve his voice for the tremendous *coda* of it; —but there has been no tenor-singing and acting like those of the love-duett in the fourth act of that opera.

On the other hand, there have been certain of Signor Mario's characters as inefficient, and little satisfactory, as the others have been bright, buoyant, and impassioned. Without reference to the musical violence done to Mozart, one might have pointed him out as the man of men born to play *Don Juan* in the opera; yet his attempt was a

cold, feeble, ineffective failure, as a piece of acting —one which no practice could have brought in the least near our ideal of the libertine hero.

Again, there has been small invention in Signor Mario's career. I can call to mind nothing "created" by him (as the French phrase it), except it be the walking lover in "Don Pasquale," which creation resolves itself into the "Serenade."—In one respect, he arrived at an unlucky time,—coming after Rubini, whose peculiar voice tempted composers to write what no one save Rubini could sing thoroughly.—Thus, in Signor Mario's singing of "I Puritani," in "La Sonnambula," and "Lucia," there has always been much to desire. Comparison betwixt him and his predecessor was inevitable. His last act in "La Favorite" may be cited as containing his most highly-finished singing, in some portions of which the mixture of intense passion and exquisite vocal delicacy exhibited by his predecessor, was almost equalled.—In florid music there has been always something wanting—but the art of execution bids fair to be lost among men. The singer who can give, in all their fulness and brilliancy, the airs of "Otello," does not exist.—The splendid songs of parade and passion in "Zelmira" are virtually lost, it is too much to be feared, for ever.

It must not be forgotten that, in one delightful

branch of his art, Signor Mario has never been surpassed, if equalled—as a singer of *Romances*. Here, again, gentle training "will out."—Who does not know the wonderful Frenchman of chamber-concerts—laced to a waist—dyed, if not rouged, to a nicety,—with a voice as hard as his face; with intensely-subduing gloves, such as only grow on French hands—the man who sings his inevitable "*Prière du Soir*," or the still more inevitable "*Ma Mère*"—or the still most inevitable small ditty about a "little child"?—but who is there that, having passed beyond the veriest childishness in music, does not suffer resentfully under the vulgarities of such virtuous simplicity?—Who does not know the Italian of musical private life, more wonderful still—since his very private musical knowledge lies in some half-a-dozen stale songs, which he cannot accompany—which nobody had better have written—yet who comes and goes in England, and who gives concerts and gets pupils—lives more easily, and dies richer, than many an accomplished gentleman and real poet has done?—What is done and suffered in this matter of *romances* in "the marble halls" of our country is terrible to think of—impossible to represent.—All the dearer, then, for its rarity, is the pleasure given by such choice chamber-music as the best songs of Schubert, Mendelssohn, Gor-

digiani, and Meyerbeer, when they are sung with poetry and intelligence.

By none have they been rendered more perfectly than by Signor Mario, — the character of amateurship which pervaded his talent adding an elegance, and something of particularity, to the speaking of the words, and the delivery of the music.—As a singer of *Romances* he has never been exceeded: rarely equalled.

One more good gift may be added to the list just offered—in which, again, the value of tastes and pursuits collateral with those of the profession adopted, may be traced. The painter's eye, as well as the lover's honeyed tongue, have had no small part in the success of the charming tenor. Few who have trod the stage have trod it dressed to such a perfection as Signor Mario. His characters recur to us as do the happiest portraits of Veronese, or Tintoretto, or Bronzino, which grow into the mind, as so many faces and figures recollected by their beauty, well set off by waving scarf or floating feather.—There is more in this than the stage-tailor's craft,—a touch of poetry, never to be undervalued, whatever be the form taken by it. Those who sneer at taste in dress—harmony of colour, proportion of form—might as well disparage perfume; or speak ill of a pleasant chord in music.—The abuse of fashion made by the Fop has nothing

to do with the use such honest means of embellishment as are within the reach of every one who has an eye, and who is calm enough to recollect that youth and middle age—the morning, the noon, and the afternoon—are not one and the same; and who will set himself forth without false promises or pretexts —as well as his years allow him.—No mistake appears to me greater than to confound this sense and feeling with personal vanity or silly coxcombry. They are not given to every one.—Nothing can well be more revolting than the writhings of the ugly to get out of their ugliness by the aid of fine clothes. Well have these been lashed by Mr. Carlyle and by Mr. Thackeray. But the love of Beauty is distinct from, and above, all that is temporary and trumpery;—and, above all men, the man who presents himself on the stage, must be encouraged to understand and to consider this as a part of his art, and of his intercourse with the public.—I have seen this by no men so well comprehended as by Signor Lablache and Signor Mario.

SIGNOR VERDI'S OPERAS.

CHARACTERISTICS.

SIGNOR VERDI is the last Italian Opera-composer of whom there is need to speak in detail here—the only writer of his country representing, during the last fifteen years, that *Maestro* of better days, whose music was heard from one end of Europe to the other. He is the only modern man among them having a style,—for better for worse.

Yet, many salient features of this style are not Signor Verdi's own. The *crescendo*, and the use —not abuse—of unison, had been suggested by Donizetti; the form of *cabaletta*, in which the phrase leaps and starts, rather than flows, by Frederico Ricci; the employment of syncopation, by Signor Pacini; the excess of *appoggiatura*, by Bellini.—No matter—by new combination known mate-

rials make a new whole.—How much of Gluck is there in Mozart's operas—how much of Paër in Signor Rossini's! Almost all great men have appropriated largely — Bach, Haydn, and Beethoven being, in music, the three most remarkable exceptions. Generally, however, the noble thieves (our own Handel the noblest) have originated as many good things as they have appropriated—thereby making their works sources, treasuries, authorities to be consulted in turn, if not models to be imitated.—This is not Signor Verdi's case,—neither can it be the case of any popular artist who belongs to a time of decadence.—Every attempt to copy him has resulted in producing something extravagantly ridiculous. The young sculptor who could take Bernini as a type, would give out works qualifying him for no more distinguished gallery than one in Bedlam.—Bernini was the greatest man of a bad time.

There is a mixture of grandeur in portions of Signor Verdi's operas, alternated with puerilities—which is impossible to be outdone in its triteness and folly.—In "Ernani," the first opera by him (as I have said) brought to England, the septett in the first act—the great *finale*, "*O sommo Carlo*"—and the final *terzett*—surprised the ear by their dignity and passion; by a certain novelty in the cast of phrase, and by a certain power—rude and feverish, it may

be—but still real.—The *Settimino* (as it is called) in "Ernani," is excellent—especially in reference to the close. And a composer will no more neglect his closes, than will a speaker his periods. The three next of Signor Verdi's operas produced here —"Nabucco," "I Lombardi," and "I due Foscari"—weakened the first favourable impression; for, in each and all of them, the strain and violence were repeated. It became obvious that the new composer relied on effect—not sound knowledge—that he preferred ferocious and gloomy stories—that rant, in short, was the expression most congenial to his genius. In his earlier operas this vigour was borne out by a naked ferocity of instrumentation, which had a certain attraction when it was heard for the first time.—And thus there have been gigantic men, who have overawed the crowd, till the moment when the crowd has perceived that huge stature with them did not imply strength, nor a bullying aspect bravery—till the fragmentary weakness of the tall figure, and the stolidity of the great face, have been appreciated at a second look.

It would seem as if, in proportion to the composer's advancement in his career, the exhausting monotony of this manner of forcing effect had suggested itself to him. Signor Verdi has obviously shown earnest solicitude to vary, to enrich, and to temper his orchestral effects, in his later

operas. He has, also, in them—as in the quartett of "Rigoletto," and one or two scenes from "Il Trovatore"—been more happily and simply inspired than in his earlier works;—but the style to which he has chosen to cling and abide—the style of a bad musical time, ill wrought out in Italy—has remained essentially the same in all—spasmodic, tawdry, untruthful—depending on musical effects of a lower order and coarser quality than those of any Italian predecessor.

Signor Verdi is, generally, the most *un*tender of Italians—past, present, (let it be hoped) to come. The broad *cantabile* in triple rhythms (9-8 or 12-8) which he allots to his lovers, and which is found so advantageous by singers who have never learned to sing but who have a long breath—singers whose voices are heavy, because they have never been trained—has only a make-believe sentimentality. But this humour of Signor Verdi's may be one of situation and chance rather than of any aridity of nature.—The "*Miserere*" scene in "Il Trovatore," commencing with the slow air for the heroine—and the half-asleep song for the gipsy-mother in the last act of the same opera—which is delicious, picturesque, and charming—testify this doubt.—There is in all of these a sweet, affectionate mournfulness, which raises them high among examples of their class, and which in-

dicates—not that the composer is incapable to conceive other emotions than those of fierce, over-wrought passion—but that the composer has fallen on evil days, when the stimulus given to certain features and details of his art—if that were to be popular—may have corroded out of him much desire to express hopes, fears, sorrows, less over-strained than those of melodrama. Often, however, when the gentle affections appear in the outrageous subjects which he has preferred, he sinks down, as if unequal to his task. The part of his Buffoon's Daughter, in the opera of "Rigoletto," (M. Victor Hugo's "Le Roi s'amuse" transformed), is cold, childish, puerile. The air sung by her when she retires to sleep on the evening of the outrage, is but a lackadaisical yawn. Even in the quartett of the last act, happily combined, her share amounts to little more than a chain of disconnected sobs,*—tragedy as physical

* That the same sort of devices may be turned in music to different use, can hardly be better proved than by comparing the heroine's part of *Gilda* in the "Rigoletto" quartett, in the *terzett* from "I due Foscari," and of ecstacy in the *finale* to the second act of "Il Trovatore"—with the false pathos of *Fiordiligi* and *Dorabella* in the parting quintett in "Cosi fan tutte."—In this piece it has always seemed to me that Mozart wished his audience to laugh at the overdone grief of the fickle fair ones, (thus preparing for their punishment), and had written in caricature-style.—Signor Verdi employs the self-same receipt, in serious earnest, to picture bitter despair, or breathless rapture.

in its way as the cough of the *Camellia* lady.—These devices belong to low art.—We have lived to see operas with a sneezing chorus (in time)—with a chorus of dogs that bark, and other such prosaic compliments.—Why not as well present the effects of cold in the head?—to go no further in the category of maladies and sorrows accompanied by symptomatic noises.—Let me recall, as a fit subject for comparison, *Desdemona's* agitated air, in the second act of Signor Rossini's grand "Otello." There, too, the vocal phrase is broken, but only for a short time; and the broken phrase is so sustained by the orchestra as to avert anything like a dislocated effect. How this broken phrase is set off by the wondrous burst of *bravura*, in which passionate despair and resolution run riot, without breaking the bounds of beauty in Music,—how, on its resumption, it is interrupted by the entrance of the chorus,—are so many strokes of that genius which cannot be extolled too highly in praise.—But the effects in that splendid song are exceptional—repeated nowhere else by Signor Rossini, though, in general, he has not been scrupulous in repeating his popular effects.—In Signor Verdi's operas, the hysterical element is as sure to have a large place, as are incitements for the singer to use the utmost force of his voice.

The absence of anything like gaiety in Signor

Verdi's music is curious—the supper-scene in "La Traviata" making the exception which proves the rule; and the gaiety there is of orgy rather than of sprightly revel.—Light-heartedness, indeed, seems to have vanished from Italian opera, without any compensating serious science having taken its place. The attempts made by Signor Verdi at dance-music in the opening scene of "Rigoletto" are paltry to the extreme: so is the masquerade-music in the second act of "La Traviata."—Think of Weber's dances in "Silvana," "Preciosa," "Der Freischütz," "Oberon;"—think of Signor Rossini's *ballets* in "Guillaume Tell;"—think of those belonging to M. Auber—of his "Muette" (on a subject lurid enough)—think of the entire first act of his exquisite "Domino Noir;"—think of M. Meyerbeer's admirable and piquant dance-music combined in "Le Prophète;"—and the absence of elegance with mirth in this last of the Italians, such as makes an union of dance and song so charming, by way of relief, (the scene admitting it), becomes very dreary.—We dance, when we are in Signor Verdi's company, on a volcano: and then we do not dance well—his tunes being bad.

With all these faults—grave ones, calculated to destroy and degrade taste beyond those of any Italian composer in the long list—Signor Verdi has one merit, and this is a great one—earnestness

in attempting dramatic expression. He is not tame or timid in his movements on his stilts. Some of his concerted pieces combine a group of contrasted emotions, within the conditions of regular musical form, which shows an advance of his predecessors.—The *finale* (I think to the second act) from "Nabucco," and the last scene from "Il Trovatore," can be instanced—His recitative is oftentimes careful in its declamation, though of late—seduced, it may be fancied, by the example of M. Meyerbeer—he has leaned too constantly to the form of recitative accompanied, closely approaching melody, which can only be used by a master-hand, without giving to the musical Drama a cloying heaviness.

Signor Verdi is not, however, to be disdained, as a shallow, or perversely insincere man, should be.—It is evident,—howsoever incomplete may have been his training, howsoever mistaken his aspirations must be proved, and thought to have been and to be—that he *has* aspired: and in this aspiration he is separated far from the "*dolce far niente*" folk, who, once having got art and its resources in their hands, have made of the same, toys, or means of money-getting.—What there is good in his music, betokens a certain elevation of instinct and ambition, with most paltry musical culture,—working with poor executants, and during an epoch of artistic decay,

only rescued from utter corruption by heavings of revolution.—A like appearance is to be seen in the time present of German music.—The waters are out: for the moment there seems small chance of calling them back;—but, while fixing attention steadily and without fear on the rush of the tide in a false direction—while attempting to discriminate what is fact from what is frenzy, in any movement, helped on by enthusiasm and accredited by Fashion —lies the best chance of turning the stream on its reflux into a healthier channel: and of strengthening all who really love Art in views of reform, and in stedfastness to those great principles which are unchanging,—howsoever the alphabet of their expression is modified, as years, and scores of years, pass and are gathered to their forefathers.

THE YEAR 1847.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

OPERAS.

"La Sonnambula," "I Puritani," "Norma."—*Bellini.* "La Favorite,"* "Lucia," "La Figlia dell' Reggimento."* —*Donizetti.* "Robert le Diable."—*Meyerbeer.* "Le Nozze di Figaro."—*Mozart.* "Nino," "Ernani," "I due Foscari,"* "I Lombardi," "I Masnadieri."*—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Sanchioli. Castellan. De Montenegro.* Jenny Lind.*—MM. Gardoni.* Superchi.* Bouche.* Coletti. Fraschini.* Staudigl. Lablache. F. Lablache.

BALLET.

"Coralia."

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Rosati.* Marie Taglioni.* Grahn. Carlotta Grisi.

THE YEAR 1847.

FROM this time forth—during some years—there were two Opera-houses. The secession of many artists, and of a large part of the orchestra and chorus, and that in the wake of their conductor, left Her Majesty's Theatre very bare.—Possibly it was an inevitable device, that, as provision for expected performances, there should be a provision of promises,—singular to recollect, now that their utterly unsubstantial basis is known. It was announced that M. Meyerbeer was to bring his "Camp de Silesie" to London—that opera which he has never allowed to travel beyond the barriers of Berlin,—aware, it may be fancied, of its weakness.—It was undertaken that Mendelssohn should, in the same season, produce his opera of "The Tempest."—There was, thirdly, to be a new opera by Signor Verdi.

Of these three promises, the last alone was

performed. It may be doubted whether anything beyond the merest preliminary negotiations had been entered into with the two great German masters. The subject of Shakespeare's delicious faëry dream had always attracted Mendelssohn. So long, ere this time, as the date of his residence in Dusseldorf, he had been in consultation with Herr Immermann on the best form of arranging Shakspeare's "Tempest" for music. I believe, that even there may have been one or two pieces sketched, if not composed by him, for the drama which never could come to pass.—But, in the autumn of this year in question, 1847, during the two memorable days I spent with him at Interlacken, a few weeks before his decease, he spoke with earnest displeasure at the unwarrantable manner in which his name had been traded on by the management of a particular theatre.—He had, he told me, positively rejected the book as written by M. Scribe, and had declined to compose it until it was wholly remodelled. Yet, after this, the venture was made of advertising it in the theatre as in his hands; of specifying the artists included in the cast—nay, and of circulating printed illustrations of the principal scenes. In no case has the tampering with expectation gone further.—The result will be seen a year or two later.

Such a parade of promises was, possibly, a des-

perate necessity, because, under the existing state of affairs, a large amount of novelty was a matter of life and death.—This year, it will be seen, not a single work by Signor Rossini was produced.—Beyond the introduction of "I due Foscari," by Signor Verdi—an opera which England has declined to accept on any terms—the *Maestro* himself arrived, with a work expressly written for the theatre—perhaps his most paltry work—"I Masnadieri," which merely can survive recollection by the stage-appearance of Mdlle. Lind, who looked Schiller's *Amalia* to the life, and by a *violoncello solo* in the Introduction, which first showed London what a consummate master of his instrument we had acquired in Signor Piatti.—These Verdi operas were failures; but two of Donizetti's operas new to England were also introduced—two of his best serious and comic operas, and both of them successful.—"La Favorite" and "La Figlia" have proved real additions to the narrowing repertory of the Italian theatre, both—the fact is worth marking—ascribable to French influence.

Thus much of the music.—There was small chance of any new female singer, save *the* one, being allowed to please:—and Madame Montenegro did not deserve to do so. The men fared somewhat better; and one—Signor Gardoni—by his charm of person and of voice (somewhat slight

though the latter has proved) did more to reconcile the public to the loss of Signor Mario than could have been expected as possible.—A word is his due —as the due of a real artist—who, from first to last, has finished every phrase that he has sung, and who has pointed every word that he has said.—There has always been the real Italian elegance—and that more universal elegance which belongs to no country—in Signor Gardoni.—Signor Fraschini, though originally gifted with greater vocal power, was less fortunate.—Fourteen years ago, we were little used to the coarse and stentorian bawling which the Italian tenors have of late affected. The newcomer, naturally anxious to recommend himself by the arts which had delighted his own people, seemed to become more and more violent in proportion as the "sensation" failed to be excited. But he "piled up the agony," *forte* on *forte* in vain. That so much noise should be received so coolly was somewhat whimsical—bitter disappointment though it must have been to one misled by home raptures.—Alas! I already look back to Signor Fraschini as a moderate, if not a temperate, Italian tenor, when compared with many who have since made the ears of right-minded persons suffer.

Herr Staudigl's appearance in Italian Opera was an utter failure. With one exception, I have not

heard even a German *basso* so awkward at the Southern language as he was.—Signor Coletti's return was an acquisition, as an available, expressive, sound singer (of the modern school) should be; and such small success as "I due Foscari" gained at Her Majesty's Theatre, was referable to his appearance as the *Doge* in the last act of that dreary setting of what Moore happily called, in a letter to Byron, "one of those violent Venetian stories."—In this, however, as I shall have to state in a future page, truly skilful and impressive as Signor Coletti proved himself to be, he was outdone by the only other representative of the character who has attempted in England—Signor Ronconi.

MADEMOISELLE JENNY LIND.

It is impossible, when treating the marvellous sensation produced at our Italian Opera by Mdlle. Jenny Lind, to confine the story to the gamut or the book of exercises — to the scene acted with emotion — to the audience delirious with enthusiasm. The circumstances must be recalled which had paved the way for the new singer's success, with as much certainty as singularity.—We have read with contempt of Gabrielli's caprices, of Catalani's magnificent extravagances (I have seen that glorious-looking woman waited on in a concert ante-room, by a page bearing a salver piled with clean gloves); but nothing, in any time, has equalled the amount of influence brought from the outside to bear on the reception of a singer, who, lacking such outward influences, would have been received as only one among many (one *after*

a few) great singers—whereas, owing to such accessory excitements, she was held in this country, for a while, to be *the* one—and the one alone.

In a position of great difficulty, it was the policy of the manager of Her Majesty's Theatre, menaced by a formidable opposition, to seek hither and thither for some attraction to replace those which had, in a body, seceded from him.—Europe was not rich just then—being poorer now. For some years past, we had been hearing of a young Swedish lady, with a marvellous voice, from whom much was to be expected. First she had been read of in one of Miss Bremer's novels, "The Home"—how she was the darling of the Opera-house in Stockholm;—next, from Berlin, where her apparition was indeed a God-send among the clumsy and exaggerated women who strode the stage, screaming as they strode.—The two great German composers had pronounced in her favour panegyrics, which, as usual, grew in importation.—With these came details of private life, and authentications of private virtue, just as eagerly minute as if they were not, of necessity, assumed—since private life and private virtue do not bare their modesty and their secrets to the paragraph-maker. Last of all, the herald-trumpets spoke of charities done—in a tone as if Charity was the exception, not the rule, among musical artists.—Now, this is a theory than which

one more fool-hardy, more false, could hardly be propounded.—Great singers have, from time immemorial, given out of both hands;—have too little regarded themselves—too largely turned their singing gifts to account.—Howsoever vain, voluptuous, and thoughtless, some among them have been, the amount of alms-giving and unselfish assistance ministered by them, without thought of notoriety or repayment—in the midst of hurried and distracting lives—in spite of uncertain gains—in the face of ingratitude—has never been stated; much of it having been concealed.—Enough, however, is known to everyone conversant with Music and with Musicians, to make the recommendation of any single singer, as Charity incarnate, cruelly unjust to a hundred others, inasmuch as it implied that singers' charity was a new thing in this world of ours before the year of grace 1847.

Nor was this all. After curiosity had been stirred to the utmost, came the further provocatives of doubt and disappointment.—It was asserted on evidence which was past question, that Mdlle. Lind would not come to England—that no argument could prevail on her to change a resolution announced as irrevocable by word and by pen.—The game of suspense was never more artfully played.—It is curious to recall, as matter of history, how for months the mind of that opera-world which

craves something to wonder about, was irritated and kept alive, by tales of mysterious vacillations, persuasions, negotiations—plenipotentiaries sent to mediate, and bringing back hints and hopes, but not downright assurances;—and all this after the treaty had been signed and sealed!—By whom all this machinery was originated, it is of no consequence here to examine. It had racked our Opera-world into a state of fever; and elevated it into a firm faith, moreover, that that which had cost so much trouble to secure, must be, indeed, something unspeakably precious.

No theatre can have displayed a scene of greater excitement, than on the evening when it was to be proved how far the wonder, so far-fetched and dearly bought, merited all that had been promised for her. She appeared as *Alice*, in "Robert"—an appearance not to be risked by any singer in the least nervous.—The girl, dragged hastily down the stage in the midst of a crowd, has, at once, and when out of breath, to begin on an accented note, without time to think or to look around her. I have never seen anyone so composed as Mdlle. Lind was on that night.—Though the thunder of welcome was loud and long enough to stop the orchestra, and to bewilder a veteran; and though it was acknowledged with due modesty, her hands did not tremble—one even arranged a

ring on the finger of the other — and her voice spoke out as firmly, as if neither fear nor failure was possible.—To me, the absence and the semblance of emotion, at once, in the midst of such overcoming excitement, were strange.—Nine hundred among the thousand interpreted what they saw in a reading entirely opposite. They were magnetized once for all, in those few first moments.—I see (as I write) the smile with which Mendelssohn, whose enjoyment of Mdlle. Lind's talent was unlimited, turned round and looked at me, as if a load of anxiety had been taken off his mind. His attachment to Mademoiselle Lind's genius as a singer was unbounded, and with it his desire for her success.

Her companions on the stage might have been celestial singers and actors—or the reverse, that night: no one cared for them—no one followed the opera. Partizanship had been fermented to such a fever heat—interest had been bespoken by such a long-drawn series of hints, mysteries, accidents—or planned measures—that excellence so real as that of the new singer was sure to be accepted, as that super-excellence in the dazzling blaze of which things good or bad alike disappear.

The scenes of *Alice*, thoroughly well given, and perfectly suited to the powers of their giver, were waited for, listened to in breathless silence, and

received with applause, which was neither encouragement, nor appreciation, nor enthusiasm,—so much as idolatry.—Woe to those during that season who ventured to say or to write that any other great singer had ever sung in the Haymarket Opera House!—To my cost, I know, that they were consigned to such ignominy as belongs to the idiotic slanderer.—Old, and seemingly-solid friendships, were broken, and for ever, in that year.—It was a curious experience, to sit and to wait for what should come next,—and to wonder whether it really *was* the case, that music had never been heard till the year 1847.

From that first moment till the end of that Opera-season, nothing else was thought about, nothing else talked about, but the new *Alice*—the new *Sonnambula*—the new *Maria*, in Donizetti's charming comic opera,—his best.—Pages could be filled by describing the excesses of the public. Since the days when the world fought for hours at the pit door to see the seventh farewell of Siddons, nothing had been seen in the least approaching the scenes at the entrance of the theatre when Mdlle. Lind sang.—Prices rose to a fabulous height.—In short, the town, sacred and profane, went mad about "the Swedish nightingale."

How far the triumph was well-deserved in its extravagance, was a question scouted for the mo-

ment as the rankest and most presumptuous heresy. No one would for a moment suffer the chorus of idolatry which attended this extraordinary woman, to be for a moment interrupted by any discussion of her genius and talent—as compared with those of any former singer.

It can now, however, without treason be recorded, that Mdlle. Lind's voice was a *soprano*, two octaves in compass—from D to D—having a possible higher note or two, available on rare occasions; and that the lower half of the register and the upper one were of two distinct qualities.—The former was not strong,—veiled, if not husky; and apt to be out of tune. The latter was rich, brilliant, and powerful—finest in its highest portions.—It can be told, that the power of respiration was possessed by Mdlle. Lind in the highest perfection; that she could turn her "very long breath" to account, in every gradation of tone; and thus, by subduing her upper notes, and giving out her lower ones, with great care could conceal the disproportions of her organ.—I imagine that her voice must have been fatigued by incessant early use on the stage. It has been said, that she only brought it into its admirable state of command after years of use, and, probably, imperfect methods of delivering it; and that the acute and intelligent Professor to whom she repaired in Paris for counsel and in-

struction, entirely refused the latter, until she had given the girl's wearied voice chance of refreshment, by rest for a considerable period.

Her execution was great;—and, as is always the case with voices originally reluctant, seemed greater than it really was. Her shake (a grace ridiculously despised of late) was true and brilliant—her taste in ornament was altogether original.—In a song from "Beatrice di Tenda" which she adopted, there was a chromatic cadence, ascending to E in *altissimo*, and descending to the note whence it had risen, which could not be paragoned, of late days, as an evidence of mastery and accomplishment.—She used her *pianissimo* tones so as to make them resemble an effect of ventriloquism.—On every note that she sang—in every bar that she delivered—a skilled and careful musician was to be detected.

No precise appreciation of her expression is possible. "It is the soul that sees," says Crabbe. Not a little of the effect produced by the artist on his audience is brought thither by the latter, who cannot stay to enquire how and wherefore his sympathies are engaged. Whatsoever were the predisposing causes, and let them be allowed for ever so largely, Mdlle. Lind did without doubt satisfy the larger number of her auditors, by giving them the impression that she was the possessor of deep and true feeling.—This satisfaction I only shared at intervals.—I will endeavour to offer such reasons

for this qualified admiration as can be given in a matter so delicate, and to support them by an illustration or two.

It was disadvantageous to Mdlle. Lind that she had, throughout her career, to sing in strange languages,—German, Italian,—last of all, English. Though she mastered all the three with her wonted industry, she delivered none of them with finished clearness. This gave more heaviness to her style than is consistent with real expression. There was always in her singing an element of conflict, beside that which might be discerned in the management of her voice.

Of all the singers whom I have ever heard Mdlle. Lind was, perhaps, the most assiduous. Her resolution to offer the very best of her best to her public seemed part and parcel of her nature and of her conscience.—Not a note was neglected by her—not a phrase slurred over.—Unlike many of the Italians, who spare themselves in uninteresting passages of any given opera to shine out in some favourite piece of display, she went through her entire part with a zeal which it was impossible not to admire, and which could not be too generally adopted as a principle by every one, great or small, who presents himself to an audience.—But, perhaps owing to this remarkable strenuousness, many of her effects on the stage appeared over-calculated.

Everything was brought out into an equally high relief.—And thus, her best part was that of *Julia*,* in Spontini's "La Vestale"—a part in which there must be effort from beginning to end—and this not only because of the story, but from the nature of Spontini's music. The faithless Vestal has not an instant of repose. In the beginning of the tale she has to hide her secret—and then to master her passion in the face of thousands, when her warrior lover returns home—and when to her is confided the agony of crowning him. Then, she has to consent to break her vows, by admitting him into the Temple at night;—and, during the passionate interchange of feelings long pent up in a shroud, with the "warm, living love," of one used to conquest, and not disposed to yield—the sacred fire which the Priestess has to ward, expires.—There remains for her only to sacrifice herself, in furtherance of her lover's escape; to be publicly disgraced—to be doomed—to be rescued from the sepulchre prepared for her by a miracle.—There is not a moment of calm, I repeat, in the part of Spontini's *Julia*. Yet it does not demand first-class tragic genius to fill it.—On both grounds, it suited Mdlle. Lind's powers admirably; and it is a pity that, owing to our English antipathy to the opera, which seems unconquerable, our public never saw so striking

* "Modern German Music," vol. ii., p. 351.

and finished a personification—and one in which Nature and Art wrought in such perfect concord.

That Mdlle. Lind made strange mistakes, in consulting her own personality rather than the play, was to be seen in her *Norma*. I had heard those wondrous discoverers, the German critical public, delight in her reading as "maidenly"—praise original, to say the least of it, when the well-known story is remembered. — Elaborately wrought as it was, it was pale, weak as compared with the rendering of the real *Norma*. Even her most thorough-going admirers, in this country, could find nothing better to say than that the part was too full of revengeful and stormy passion, and of remorse, for it to be in anywise rightly presented by one in nature so devoutly different.

Her *Alice*, in M. Meyerbeer's "Robert," was excellent throughout. The F and G sharp in her upper voice, called out in the final *trio*, and delivered with admirable breadth, were sufficient to stamp her as a peculiar singer, and a great musician. She threw much devotional feeling into her acting.—It was found so delightful that, in progress of time, could be seen the opera of "Robert," presented at Her Majesty's Theatre, offered with two acts cut out,—those, I mean, in which the *Princess*, a rival woman to *Alice*, appears.—Her *Amina*, in "La Sonnambula," was the character

in which she made the most effect on her public. The *largo* in the last scene, given in a penetrating whisper,—while she let the flowers, one by one, of the treasured token-nosegay strew the stage,—fascinated the audience, and most justly.—It was new —it was true—it served to exhibit all the singer's best qualities.—She did not sing the final *rondo* half so well as Madame Persiani.—Her *Lucia*, in Donizetti's sickly opera, was better as a whole—though, as the opera is closed, not by the *Bride of Lammermoor*, but by *Ravenswood*, the part was less congenial to a singer, who seemed resolved to dominate beyond any artist whom I have seen—than one in which she could wind up any story which she had begun.—She was the only *Lucia* (as was pointed out to me by M. Berlioz) who prepared for the last dismal heart-break, by her agony in the moment when she is impressed with the falsehood of her lover by her haughty and tyrannical brother. Her madness was fearfully touching, in proportion as it had been foreseen.—In "La Figlia dell' Reggimento," (another of her most admired characters), she was surpassed—strange to say!—by her elder successor, Sontag,—as to life, as to vulgarity, as to vocal brilliancy.—It was the fashion, and the passion, to extol her as an incomparable singer of Mozart's music,—but her *Susanna* was stiff, heavy, conscientious:—the *disinvoltura* (we have no precise

English equivalent) required, co-existent with a sincere musical rendering of every note and phrase, was not there. I liked much her *Adina* in "L'Elisir," — more than the generality of her idolators.—There was a perverse caprice in her reading of the character; a quick, and sharp, and strange brilliancy in some of her ornaments, which made it by much the best presentation of the village coquette that I recollect. Perhaps, by drawing out the essential ungraciousness of the character, she may have spoilt her own chances of pleasing her subjects in it.—In England, we are singularly averse to anything like mixture or complexity of emotions—even though it *was* an Englishman who called up "the serpent of old Nile"—*Cleopatra.*

Such are some of those characteristics of Mdlle. Lind as a dramatic singer, the perpetual recurrence of which in her performances makes me recollect them with more calmness than was endurable to the frenzied folk of the hour, who crowded into the theatre to come out vehement in rapture.

One more remark, in conclusion, may be thought to bear upon the subject. During her stage career, Mdlle. Lind created very little.—Her *Vielka*, in M. Meyerbeer's "Camp of Silesia," (written for Berlin, and subsequently altered into "L'Etoile du Nord" for Paris), is the only character of her own which was successful.—Her *Amalia*, in Signor

Verdi's "I Masnadieri," could not have pleased had it been given by *Saint Cecilia* and *Melpomene* in one;—so utterly worthless was the music.—In short, Mdlle. Lind's opera-repertory was limited,—one which must have exposed her on every side to comparisons,—should she have remained on the stage till enthusiasm cooled, as it must inevitably have done.—If she became aware of this, and if such conviction had its part in her determination to give up the theatre for the concert-room,—the conviction was a wise one. In a rambling book such as this, I may be allowed to digress, and as a pleasure, to put on record the admirable qualities of the Swedish Lady as a concert-singer.—The wild, queer, northern tunes brought here by her—her careful expression of some of Mozart's great airs—her mastery over such a piece of execution as "the Bird Song" in Haydn's "Creation"—and lastly, the grandeur of inspiration with which the "Sanctus" of angels in Mendelssohn's "Elijah" was led by her (the culminating point in that Oratorio)—are so many things to leave on the mind of all who have heard them—as many indelible prints.—These are the triumphs, in my poor judgment, which will stamp Madame Lind-Goldschmidt's name in the Golden Book of singers.

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